

# COUNTERING ISIS: ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?

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## HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2014

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ed Royce (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ROYCE. This hearing will come to order.

I am going to ask the members and those in the audience to take their seats at this time.

This morning we welcome back Ambassador McGurk for an update on the critical effort to counter ISIS. And the Ambassador was one of the few in the administration sounding the ISIS alarm early on, as you did with this committee. We were holding hearings last February, speaking about this problem and the need to use air power to turn back ISIS.

After 4 months of the U.S.-led air campaign in Iraq and in Syria, ISIS still controls essentially the same amount of territory that it did in the summer. And one of the reasons for this, in my opinion, is the limited nature of this effort. We have conducted only about 1,000 air strikes to date.

Now, if you compared that to when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and the response on the part of the United States, back then we had 1,000 sorties per day. So you get an idea in terms of the response and how minimal it is compared to what we have seen in the past to deter an entity like this. Moreover, the committee is concerned by reports that targeting has been micromanaged from the White House. This clearly has been an issue within the Pentagon. But even with this flawed air campaign, Kurdish and Iraqi security forces have pushed ISIS out of specific key infrastructure areas, such as Mosul and the Haditha dams. They have done that without the heavy equipment that they need. They have done that at great loss, the shedding of a lot of their blood. And, frankly, more coalition air attacks would mean more ISIS defeats.

Another pillar of the administration effort is to provide training and weapons to U.S. partners on the ground in Iraq and in Syria. But when we look at that program in Syria, U.S.-backed groups have seen no increase in support in the past several months. In fact, the Syrian groups have suffered from dire ammunition shortages in the last several weeks. We had meetings with their representative recently. They are out of ammunition. In addition to

not being supplied with the heavy weapons they need to fight ISIS and at the same time as they are fighting ISIS, for example, on the border there, Aleppo has ISIS on one side and 30, 40 air strikes a day barrel bombs being dropped from the Assad regime on their forces while they are trying to fight ISIS.

In Iraq, the Kurdish Peshmerga remain the most effective fighting force against ISIS, but the administration and Baghdad have refused thus far to supply them with anything more than light weapons as they go up against ISIS's tanks and artillery and Humvees and other heavy weapons.

There was a tragic event a couple of weeks ago, where you had a small squadron of Peshmerga trying to take on 10 tanks—or 10 armored personnel carriers, 10 pieces of armor, that were put into play by ISIS against them. They only had small arms and, as a consequence, they called in for air strikes, but after 2½ hours—and it took a quite considerable time for those air strikes to come in—they had been wiped out on the ground.

This is why we have heard from the foreign minister that the situation for the Peshmerga with their need for armor and for artillery, for long-range mortars, for antitank missiles—that unmet need has had very real consequences for them. I am hopeful that the recent accord announced between Baghdad and Erbil, which I appreciate the administration has helped engineer, will speed support for the Kurds. If not, the ranking member and I have legislation to do just that.

Although the administration notes that 60-plus countries have joined the anti-ISIS campaign, some key partners continue to perceive the administration's strategy as misguided. Turkey, for one, has withheld use of its air base, involvement of its ground forces and other resources. And the Saudis and other Arabs don't see how allowing Assad to pummel those on the ground from the air in Aleppo makes any sense.

Instead, they push, of course, for a no-fly area along the Kurdish border, where they suggest they and Jordan can patrol that long term to keep from having the Free Syrian forces hit from the air by Assad at the very time they are trying to fight against ISIS.

Meanwhile, there are grave security consequences to allowing ISIS to control a territory of the size of western Iraq and eastern Syria. Clearly, as of September, there were already over 15,000 foreign fighters within ISIS and, reportedly, ISIS has been recruiting 1,000 new fighters per month.

This is part of the problem of not turning back ISIS, is that, on social media, they use the argument that they are on the advance, they are carrying out their jihad, and, of course, this resonates with certain young men who enlist in their cause. This is why we would argue that a more effective strategy that would roll them back would hurt their recruiting effort. And these fighters, particularly with western passports, have the potential to attack us at home.

As members may remember, when Secretary Kerry testified here in September, he said it is time for the defensive strategy we and our international partners have pursued thus far to transition to an offensive strategy.

Ambassador McGurk, with a lackluster air campaign, severely under-supplied partners on the ground, and key allies with deep concerns about the President's strategy, I just don't see how, you know, this is a credible offense, and we would like to talk to you—I would like to ask you about that.

And, of course, next Congress, this committee expects to consider a new authorization for use of military force to support this effort, and that is something we will do under a timeframe that is befitting of the gravity of the issue. And the committee also expects that the Commander in Chief will come to Congress with his request and work in a bipartisan way to garner maximum support.

Before turning to the ranking member, I would like to note that this is the last full committee hearing of the 113th Congress, and we have accomplished a lot in the last 2 years, for which I would like to recognize all the members for their contribution.

And for those members who will not be returning, we wish you well.

And I was going to turn to Mr. Engel at this time, whose long-held observations on Syria have proven prophetic. He has seen things as they really were on the ground, frankly, before—before many and suggested a strategy to engage ISIS before this committee some 2 years ago.

While we wait for the ranking member, my suggestion then would be that we go, Ambassador, to your testimony. And after you conclude, he will make his opening statement.

Ambassador McGurk.

This morning we are pleased to be joined by Brett McGurk, the Ambassador who was recently tapped to serve as the Deputy Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, working alongside General Allen.

He concurrently serves as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq and Iran. He was previously Senior Advisor to Ambassadors Ryan Crocker, Christopher Hill, and James Jeffrey in Baghdad.

Without objection, the witness's full prepared statement will be made part of the record. Members will have 5 calendar days to submit statements and questions and extraneous material for the record.

And, Ambassador, if you would please summarize your remarks. Thank you for being with us.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE BRETT MCGURK, DEPUTY SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL ENVOY FOR THE GLOBAL COALITION TO COUNTER ISIL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Ambassador MCGURK. Thank you, Chairman Royce, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, and members of the committee. It is an honor to appear again before this committee to provide an update on the global campaign to degrade and defeat ISIL.

Before discussing the state of the campaign and where we are going, I would like to reflect briefly on how far we have come in the 6 months since the city of Mosul in Iraq fell.

I was in northern Iraq on June 10th, 6 months ago today, when Mosul collapsed. Over the next 72 hours, ISIL formations poured through the Tigris Valley, multiple cities fell, entire army divisions

collapsed, and ISIL threatened the northern approaches to Baghdad.

To the west, a lesser noted, but equally devastating, offensive took place from across the Syrian border with ISIL capturing the strategic Iraqi border city of al Qaim. ISIL then poured down the Euphrates Valley, threatening the western approaches to Baghdad.

In Baghdad during this period, just 6 months ago this week, there was a growing panic within the population, the Government, security services, and the diplomatic community. At the Embassy, we prepared for the worst-case scenario and evacuated 1,500 people, moving them to Amman, Kuwait, or Erbil. We also prepared to help the Iraqis fight back.

Within 72 hours of Mosul's collapse, the President ordered four initiatives to hold the line and set the conditions for a possible counteroffensive.

First, we surged intelligence over the skies of Iraq. We went from flying one platform per month to 60 per day, gaining a more granular picture of the ISIL network, which is essential to any military campaign.

Second, we established joint operation centers in Baghdad and Erbil, restoring critical relationships with Iraqi and Kurdish commanders and gaining new insight into their capabilities and needs.

Third, we deployed special forces teams to assess Iraqi and Kurdish security formations with a focus on the defense of Baghdad.

And, finally and perhaps most importantly, we supported the Iraqis as they worked to stand up a new and more inclusive Government following national elections.

Throughout the summer months, we worked these four tracks simultaneously, learning more about ISIL, its locations, its movement, and leadership patterns, restored relationships with Iraqi commanders, and learned more about the deficiencies within their security services while supporting Iraqi political leaders as they stood up a new Government.

For all of these reasons, on August 8th, when the President first ordered U.S. military forces to conduct air strikes in Iraq, we were able to act with precision and efficacy.

On September 8th, 1 month later, the Iraqi Parliament inaugurated a new Iraqi Government with a new prime minister and new and very different leaders across nearly every key cabinet position, including oil, finance, and defense.

This new Government, led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, represents a bulwark against ISIL and a significant break from the past in three key respects.

First, its governing philosophy is decentralization or a functioning federalism with authorities and resources delegated to provinces and regions within the constitutional structure of Iraq. Last week's historic oil accord with the Kurdistan region is an outgrowth of this new policy.

Second, the new Government has committed to significant security reforms, including a smaller, more agile army, strengthen security forces at the local level, including tribal forces, and, ultimately, provincial-based national guards.

Third, the new Government is committed to a policy of restoring relations with regional capitals and maintaining Iraq's strategic



independence and regional balance. Even in its first 100 days, the new Government has made or exchanged breakthrough visits with UAE, Turkey, Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Nonetheless, despite this progress, the challenges of this new Government are truly enormous. ISIL has thousands of fighters controlling territory in three major cities in Iraq where state structures have collapsed.

The Iraqi economy, which had been growing at 4 percent per year, is now predicted to contract due to falling oil prices. This new Government, despite the promise, simply cannot defeat ISIL and stabilize Iraq on its own. It will need the support of the United States and of the world. That is why we have established a global campaign to prosecute a comprehensive effort against ISIL.

Last week in Brussels, Secretary Kerry chaired a historic conference that brought together 60 coalition partners to affirm a common and shared commitment across five lines of effort. This conference, for the first time, formalized the global coalition to defeat and degrade ISIL.

The lines of effort include military support to our partners, countering foreign fighters, countering ISIL financing, humanitarian support, and delegitimizing ISIL's ideology and messaging.

We are now seeing progress along each of these lines of effort. On the military side, there are now seven countries flying combat air missions over Iraq and five doing the same over Syria. To date, we have conducted over 1,200 air strikes against ISIL terrorists.

As a result of these strikes, ISIL's offensive has been halted, its ability to amass and maneuver forces degraded, its leadership sales pressure are eliminated, its command and control supply lines severed.

In the past 60 days alone, Iraqi forces have retaken ground at Mosul Dam, Erbil border, and Baiji Refinery in southern Baghdad. They have also held the line at Haditha Dam, Ramadi, and Amerli.

Efforts to generate additional forces, specifically 12 new brigades, including three Kurdish Peshmerga brigades, will soon begin at multiple sites across Iraq with cooperation from our coalition partners.

In Syria, Kurdish and Arab fighters at Kobani, under the cover of our air strikes, implemented a massive ISIL assault, leading to significant attrition of ISIL fighters. They are now losing more than 100 fighters per week, including top commanders and top foreign fighters. Moderate opposition forces are also holding their ground against ISIL north of Aleppo.

On combating foreign fighters, we now have in place a Chapter VII Security Council resolution calling on all member States to stem the flow of foreign fighters to Syria. Members of the coalition are increasingly criminalizing foreign fighter-related activities. In the past month alone, foreign fighter networks have been broken up in Austria and Malaysia and foreign fighters prosecuted in Germany, Australia, and the UK.

On counter-finance, we are working with partners to cut the avenues of revenue and we are destroying ISIL's refining capacity, denying its main source of revenue from oil trade. These efforts are now having an impact.

On the humanitarian front, much has been done, but far more is needed, and this was the key focus of our conference in Brussels last week.

Finally, on countering ISIL's message, we have begun an aggressive campaign led primarily by our partners in the Middle East region. We have seen fatwas issued from top religious leaders in Egypt and Saudi Arabia declaring ISIL a direct threat to Islam, and other coalition partners are working to establish operations rooms to combat ISIL's social media presence and messaging campaign in real time.

As President Obama's envoys to the anti-ISIL coalition, General John Allen and I have visited 16 capitals over the past few months to discuss cooperation across these lines of effort. We have found the coalition strongly and firmly united, particularly when it comes to the way forward in Iraq.

The situation in Syria is more complex and our tools, for the moment, more limited. General Allen and I hear a common set of questions about the best way forward in Syria and, also, a divergence on how to proceed.

Many of our coalition partners do not envision themselves as having signed up to bring about a political transition in Syria through military force, considering such a transition potentially even more destabilizing than the situation we face now. At the same time, other coalition partners are urging strikes against the Assad regime, considering the regime a central source of instability in the region.

Our message to all these partners has been clear. We believe there must be a political transition in Syria through a negotiated political process. We are firm in our commitment that any future government cannot include Bashar al-Assad, who has forfeited any claim of legitimacy to govern and remains a magnet for terrorism in the region.

A political transition will also require a strong counterweight to extremists like ISIL. That is why the Department of Defense is leading an effort to train and equip moderate opposition forces, subject to authorization and funding from Congress.

This process, of course, will take time, and throughout we will constantly assess how we can best ensure the moderate forces in the field are able to protect themselves against multiple threats, including ISIL, the Nusra Front, and the Syrian regime.

In conclusion, looking back from 6 months ago at this very hour, we have indeed begun to make progress against ISIL. But I want to emphasize this will be a long-term, multi-year campaign. We are now in the earliest phases of Phase 1. And as we move into a new phase, it will require a global effort in addition to the ongoing support from this Congress.

So I am honored to be here to discuss with you today the state of the campaign, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador McGurk follows:]

**Statement for the Record**

**Brett McGurk, *Deputy Special Presidential Envoy to the Coalition to Counter ISIL, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs***

**House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:*****Countering ISIL: Are We Making Progress?***

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, it is an honor to appear again before this Committee to discuss the global campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This Committee was a leading voice in drawing attention to the growing menace of ISIL over a year ago, and I want to thank you up front for the support that you have provided to enable us to work with local partners in Iraq and Syria to begin pushing ISIL back.

My testimony today will focus first on Iraq with a brief overview of what has transpired since the city of Mosul fell to ISIL exactly six months ago. I will then discuss the current situation in Iraq, including both the promise and the inevitable challenges facing its new and inclusive federal government, as well as our ongoing efforts to create the conditions to combat ISIL in Syria and foster the conditions for a political transition process to move forward.

I will also explain key elements of our integrated campaign to defeat ISIL, now anchored by a 60-member global coalition. This global coalition was formalized for the first time last week in Brussels, with all members endorsing a common framework for organizing our efforts going forward.

**I. Background: Last 180 Days in Iraq**

On June 10, exactly six months ago today, the city of Mosul, with a population of 1.5 million people, fell to ISIL terrorists. I was in northern Iraq at the time, and have previously testified before this Committee regarding the events that led to Mosul's fall, and what soon followed.

This was an intense period of uncertainty and panic. Within 72 hours, ISIL formations poured from Mosul south through the Tigris Valley. Multiple cities fell. Entire divisions of the Iraqi Army disintegrated. Outside Tikrit, ISIL terrorists captured nearly 1,000 Iraqi Air Force recruits, led them to

their deaths, and put the slaughter on YouTube. Nearby, ISIL surrounded the Baiji refinery – beginning a siege that would last five months.

To the west, a lesser noted, but equally devastating offensive took place across the Syrian border. ISIL captured the strategic border city of al Qaim after a multi-pronged assault combining artillery strikes and maneuver forces. They then poured down the Euphrates valley, threatening the eastern approaches to Baghdad and its international airport.

In Baghdad itself, there was a growing dread among the population, Iraqi security services, and the diplomatic community. On June 13, ISIL’s spokesman, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani vowed: “The battle would soon rage in Baghdad and [the holy city] of Karbala.” Rumors began of an imminent “zero hour” in Baghdad to mark a multi-pronged ISIL assault on the capital. Our intelligence could neither confirm nor deny the reports.

Adnani next called on all ISIL fighters to “put on your [suicide] belts and get ready.” To ensure the safety of U.S. personnel, we relocated 1,500 civilians from our embassy in Baghdad to safer locations, mostly outside of Iraq. The situation during these critical days threatened a spiral towards wholesale state collapse. We were determined not to let that happen, however. Our consistent message to the Iraqis was to hold firm – and prepare to fight.

President Obama during this period ordered four initiatives to improve our own picture and help the Iraqis prepare a potential counter-offensive:

First: We surged intelligence assets over Iraq, from one intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance (ISR) sortie per month to 60 per day. The aim was to gain a more granular picture of the ISIL network, which would be essential to any future operations.

Second: We established joint operations centers in Baghdad and in Erbil, restoring critical relationships with Iraqi central government and Kurdish commanders, and gaining an understanding of their capabilities and needs.

Third: We deployed Special Forces teams to assess Iraqi Security formations, with a focus on Baghdad’s defenses, ensuring that those defenses could hold, and that our personnel would be protected.

Fourth: We focused on helping the Iraqis maintain their political process following national elections to stand up a new government.

For the next several weeks, we worked these tracks in parallel, studying ISIL's leadership networks, movements, and patterns; restoring ties to key Iraqi security commanders; learning more about Iraqi Security Force deficiencies; and helping to keep the Iraqi political process on track.

For these reasons, on August 8th, when President Obama ordered air strikes against ISIL targets, our military forces were able to strike with precision and efficacy, due to sound intelligence and strong cooperation with Iraqi security counterparts on the ground. It was one month after these air strikes began that Iraq inaugurated a new – and very different – government.

Looking back, it is clear that the rapid decisions made during a period of deep fog and friction helped set a new foundation for stability in Iraq – and a new platform to begin taking the fight to ISIL. Central to this process was the new Iraqi government, led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

## **II. New Iraqi Government**

Iraq's new government reflects the full diversity of Iraq, with Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish leaders sharing power through an equitable distribution of cabinet posts and portfolios. The government is also committed to an inclusive national program, as enacted unanimously by the 328-member Iraqi parliament. The national program encompasses key elements of "functioning federalism," which is a driving principle for our policy.

A functioning federalism envisions an Iraq with important powers delegated to provinces, empowering local leaders to protect their communities as an integral part of Iraq's constitutional structure. The national program encompasses this principle, outlining plans for the Government of Iraq to distribute greater governing authority to regions and provinces.

Two central pillars of this concept include 1) security reform – with a smaller national army and more security responsibilities delegated to the provinces; and 2) equitable revenue sharing – with local institutions resourced to provide for their communities, and deny space to extremists.

**Security Reform.** The new Iraqi government has committed to building a smaller national army, consisting of eight divisions, and focused primarily on national sovereign functions. Army units will be based outside cities, with a mission to protect borders, preserve the sovereignty of the state, and be prepared to respond as overwatch units when local forces need support.

Primary day-to-day security responsibility will be handled by local police and provincial-based national guards. In the Kurdish region, primary security will be handled by Kurdish forces, but with funding derived from national resources, and as a part of the constitutional structure.

We believe that this security architecture – based squarely on the model outlined in the Iraqi constitution and endorsed by the new Iraqi government – is sustainable because it responds to realities on the ground, carries broad support within Iraq, and is designed over time to deny space for any armed group to operate outside a legal framework, including ISIL.

It will take time, however, to bring this program to fruition, and a number of intermediate steps must take place along the way. That is why the new government, with our support, is working to train and equip thousands of tribal fighters in Anbar province, even before there is formal legislation to introduce the National Guard concept. These fighters will join Iraqi forces to clear their areas from ISIL, and may ultimately become the backbone of local police and National Guard forces in the province.

We have also been encouraged by Prime Minister Abadi's reform of the overly centralized security structures that had existed under the previous government. He has abolished the "Office of the Commander in Chief," which centralized security control inside the Prime Minister's office; in addition, he has named a new Minister of Defense – a Sunni Arab from Mosul – and replaced nearly five dozen senior officers with new leaders who are now working to build trust with communities they serve.

**Revenue Sharing.** The other pillar of a functioning federalism is revenue sharing and ensuring resources are allocated equitably to empower locally based institutions to deliver services and meet local needs. Security remains a precondition to effective resource allocation, but as soon as security is restored in areas ISIL now controls, local actors must be empowered and resourced to begin rebuilding as rapidly as possible.

Iraq took a major step forward in this regard last week, when the federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, reached an interim accord on hydrocarbon exports and revenue sharing.

Under this arrangement, the KRG will export a total of 550,000 barrels of oil per day through the federal Iraqi system for the first time since 2012. The Government of Iraq, in turn, will resume its monthly transfers of 17% of the Iraqi budget to the KRG, and also allocate funds specifically to support the Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

This deal is important for Iraq's political and economic stability and a testament to the potential of this new Iraqi Government. The terms of the deal are not new, but it took new leadership – and cooperation between a new Finance Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, Oil Minister, Adel Abd al-Mahdi, and senior KRG officials, particularly Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani – to finalize its terms, with the full support of Prime Minister Abadi.

These two pillars of functioning federalism – security reform and revenue sharing – must move in parallel with broader items on Iraq's national program, including criminal justice reforms and ending the system of “de-Baathification.” Importantly, this is not an agenda imposed by the United States or anyone else upon Iraq – it was developed by and for Iraqis.

As Prime Minister Abadi said last week in Brussels, speaking before foreign ministers from nearly 60 countries around the world:

“We are grateful for the support of the United States and every other member of the coalition. But we know that, on the ground, this is first and foremost our fight. And we understand that, in Iraq, while military action is necessary to defeat DAESH, we also need governmental reform, national reconciliation, and economic and social reconstruction. Our newly-elected government is undertaking all these tasks – all at once. And our efforts are already beginning to show results.”

There are signs of his matching these words to actions. Last week, on the same day the oil accord was announced, the Prime Minister issued an executive order to reform the process of handling detainees – mandating that anyone held without charge be released, and compiling a central database to ensure full tracking and accountability for anyone detained by the state.

Further to these reforms, the Iraqi government is working within its limited capacity to protect vulnerable communities under threat from ISIL. This is

an enormous undertaking, given that more than two million Iraqis have been internally displaced since January. In early November, the GOI, in coordination with the KRG, provided over 110 tons of humanitarian supplies to members of the Yezidi minority who continue to reside on Mount Sinjar. The GOI is also working with the KRG to help ensure that Christians and other minority groups have the capacity to protect their communities once ISIL is expelled from these ancient homelands.

Finally, the new government has embraced a policy of engagement with the region after years of strained relations between Baghdad, Arab capitals, and Ankara. Iraq's new Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Ja'afari, traveled to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, and Turkey shortly after inauguration of the Abadi government. Foreign Ministers of the UAE and Kuwait have made official visits to Baghdad, and Abadi plans to visit Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City over the coming weeks. Relations with Jordan are particularly strong after Prime Minister Abadi visited King Abdullah in October, and both capitals are now discussing expanding economic and security cooperation.

Relations with Turkey and Saudi Arabia had been particularly strained during the Maliki era. Today, they are improving. Turkish Prime Minister Davutoglu visited Baghdad and Erbil on November 20 in a breakthrough visit. I was in Istanbul with Vice President Biden the next day, and we heard from Davutoglu about Turkey's positive view of the new Iraqi government and plans to provide security assistance to Iraqi forces, including Kurdish forces. He also informed us that Turkey and Iraq will now reestablish joint high-level committees to address mutual interests. The United States, Turkey, and Iraq are now working in close coordination to strengthen these ties.

Regarding Saudi Arabia, in July it provided \$500 million – the largest contribution to the UN for the crisis – to assist internally displaced Iraqis. Last month, Iraq's President, Fuad Massum, led a broad delegation to Riyadh, and Saudi Arabia said it would reopen its embassy in Baghdad for the first time since 1990. Prime Minister Abadi met last week with Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal to follow up on these discussions. This past Sunday in Bahrain, I discussed the issue with Iraqi Foreign Minister Ja'afari, who said a site has now been identified for a future Saudi embassy, and both sides were working to facilitate the process.

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While these are all promising signs, this new government faces some of the greatest challenges of any government on earth. ISIL retains thousands of fighters on Iraqi soil and controls nearly one-quarter of its territory, including two major cities. The IMF has also predicted that the Iraqi economy, which had been growing steadily at 4 percent per-year, is now contracting, due primarily to the falling price of oil.

The economic shock from falling oil prices will impact on our planning. The Government of Iraq is almost entirely dependent on oil revenues, and susceptible to the volatility of oil prices. This drop in revenue from prices falling by nearly \$30 per barrel, combined with increases in security and humanitarian expenses, has critically impacted Iraq's economic health and the new Iraqi government's capacity to manage the multiple crises it confronts.

For this and many other reasons, this new government simply cannot defeat ISIL and stabilize Iraq on its own; it needs the support of the United States, and we need the support of our partners from around the world.

### **III. The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL**

At root, ISIL is not an Iraq or Syria problem; ISIL is a global problem – and a direct threat to U.S. interests. That is why President Obama and Secretary Kerry have focused on building an international coalition to support a comprehensive strategy to degrade and defeat ISIL. These efforts began on September 4 at the NATO Summit in Wales, expanded to GCC partners on September 10 in Jeddah, and expanded further through multiple ISIL-related events during the UN General Assembly in New York, including a special meeting of the UN Security Council chaired by Secretary Kerry.

On September 13, President Obama appointed John Allen and me to serve as his special envoys to help formalize this coalition. It is an honor to serve in this role, and alongside General Allen, who brings unparalleled experience to this most critical mission. Since our appointment, we have traveled to 16 capitals, many multiple times, engaged the 28 allies of NATO, the 28 EU members, the Arab League, and other international organizations.

All of these efforts culminated last week in Brussels, Belgium, where Secretary Kerry chaired a historic conference to formalize an anti-ISIL

coalition of more than 60 partners from around the world. At the end of this conference, all members unanimously endorsed a detailed joint statement to guide and coordinate our global efforts going forward, including commitment to five lines of effort designed to degrade and defeat ISIL.

The five lines of effort include:

1. Supporting military operations, capacity building, and training;
2. Disrupting the flow of foreign terrorist fighters;
3. Cutting off ISIL's access to financing and funding;
4. Addressing associated humanitarian relief and crises;
5. Exposing ISIL's true nature (ideological delegitimization).

Going forward, we will measure our success as a coalition and progress in our campaign to defeat ISIL across each of these lines of effort. Thus far, while it remains early in this long-term campaign, there is progress across each line of effort and a clear program for the coming months.<sup>1</sup>

**1. Military Support from Partners.** The military campaign against ISIL is centered on degrading ISIL from the air and defeating ISIL by working with ground forces to clear and hold territory. Over the skies of Iraq, there are now seven countries flying combat missions with U.S. forces – France, the UK, Belgium, The Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and Denmark. This air coalition has conducted more than 600 precision airstrikes, helped Iraqi central government and Kurdish forces hold and take back key terrain, and degraded ISIL's ability to mass and maneuver – which had been central to its operations. We have also killed a number of its top leaders, and those who are still alive can no longer communicate with ISIL formations and combat units.

Thus far, Iraqi security operations have helped restore strategic sites like the Mosul Dam and Baiji Refinery to state control, held off ISIL offensives in Anbar province, strengthened the defensive corridor around Baghdad, and secured major roadways and supply routes. There is hard fighting ahead, and ISIL is able to respond at times with localized offensives and

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<sup>1</sup> While the global coalition is organized around these five lines of effort, the U.S. strategy and allocation of U.S. resources are allocated along nine lines of effort, many of which – such as “protecting the homeland” do not have a coalition corollary.

atrocities – including, last month, attacks against innocent men, women, and children of the Albu Nimr tribe in Anbar province. The main ISIL offensive, however, has been halted – and is now being rolled back.<sup>2</sup>

We are now planning the next phase of the Iraq campaign. U.S. military training and advising personnel are deployed to engage directly with Iraqi security commanders and tribal leaders to organize a counteroffensive. We are also working with a number of coalition partners to establish several sites across Iraq to train 12 new Iraqi brigades (nine Iraqi Army and three Kurdish Peshmerga). These sites will be located in northern, western, and southern Iraq – and the forces they generate will be designed to help Iraq restore and retain sovereign control over its territory.<sup>3</sup>

Iraq must also focus urgently on pushing resources to areas recovered from ISIL, and it has asked for coalition support to help do this. Such support will be essential given Iraq's macro-economic situation and lack of excess funds to move resources quickly and efficiently. During the Brussels meeting last week, Prime Minister Abadi specifically requested the creation of an international reconstruction fund "to encourage the residents to return to their homes, to create jobs, and to tackle some of the causes of the rise of Daesh." Secretary Kerry has endorsed this project, and we are in discussions now with coalition partners to begin its development.

In Syria, U.S. and partner nation forces have conducted more than 500 airstrikes against ISIL targets. We are conducting these operations in Syria at the specific request of the new Iraqi government and with the specific aim to degrade ISIL's war fighting capacities (manpower, leadership, command and control, armored vehicles, and safe havens). We are also looking for ways to fuse these operations in a manner that strengthens

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<sup>2</sup> We remain concerned by reports of unregulated militia activity in various parts of Iraq. These militias are a vestige of the crisis over the summer, and the new Iraqi government is working to rein in their excesses and ultimately bring all armed groups under the clear auspices of the Iraqi state. Prime Minister Abadi made the following pledge last week in Brussels, which we fully support: "We affirm our constitutional commitment not to allow any armed group or militia to work outside or in parallel to the Iraqi Security Forces. No arms would be permitted outside the control of the Iraqi Government."

<sup>3</sup> Last month, nearly 200 military planners from 33 countries met at CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa to discuss and refine the next phase of this campaign.

moderate opposition forces and allows them to hold territory. The Asad regime has shown that it cannot or will not confront terrorist groups effectively. The regime's own actions have fueled the rise of ISIL and other extremist groups in the region.

Our air coalition over Syria includes valuable contributions from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Jordan, and Qatar. (Note: Coalition partners have conducted nearly ten percent of all the air strikes conducted in Syria and Iraq.) The most intensive operations in Syria have occurred near the town of Kobani, where local Syrian fighters, both Arabs and Kurds – with the assistance of Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga – have heroically resisted a large-scale ISIL assault. As of today, that assault has failed, and has resulted in nearly 1,000 ISIL fighters killed, including many leaders.

The ongoing defense of Kobani demonstrates in Syria what we have seen over the past 100 days at multiple locations across Iraq: every time we can combine a local ground force, with sound intelligence, and the ability to coordinate air strikes – ISIL has been defeated.

This trend-line has potential to continue over the coming months in Iraq now that it has a new government and local forces with legitimacy and capacity to fight ISIL in coordinated defensive and offensive operations. The situation in Syria, however, is more challenging. While the moderate Syrian opposition is a willing partner in the fight against ISIL, at present it faces deficiencies in terms of equipment, capacity, organization, and command and control – all of which are necessary conditions to the type of sustained maneuver operations we are beginning to see in Iraq.

The Department of Defense is working with several coalition partners on a train and equip program that seeks to enhance the capabilities of moderate Syrian opposition fighters. In Brussels last week, key coalition partners agreed to significantly boost assistance to these moderate Syrian forces, which, as the final joint statement noted: “are fighting on multiple fronts against ISIL/Daesh, Al Nusrah Front, and the Syrian regime.”

Accordingly, while the primary thrust of our campaign over the coming months will be in Iraq, we will work in parallel – subject to the authorities and resources as provided by Congress – to begin training these moderate opposition forces at multiple sites in the region, including in Turkey. We are strengthening the moderate opposition both to act as a counterweight to

ISIL and also to advance the prospects for a negotiated political transition in Damascus. Our goal remains helping the Syrian people reach a political transition, and that means a future without Assad or ISIL. As the President stated in his Address to the Nation on September 10:

“In the fight against ISIL, we cannot rely on an Assad regime that terrorizes its own people – a regime that will never regain the legitimacy it has lost. Instead, we must strengthen the opposition as the best counterweight to extremists like ISIL, while pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria’s crisis once and for all.”

## **2. Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Fighters**

Foreign fighters are the lifeblood of ISIL. They represent nearly all of its suicide bombers, its most hardened operatives (many with combat experience on other fronts such as the Caucasus), and are responsible for many of the mass atrocities witnessed across Syria and Iraq, including the beheadings of American citizens. They also represent an acute threat to the entire world, as a would-be suicide bomber will be directed to where he is told to go – whether a mosque in Baghdad or a subway in Madrid.

For these reasons, we are taking a global approach to combat this problem, and working with partners to shut down the networks beginning in source countries, share information on passenger records, track foreign fighters traveling to and from Syria, and boost the screening and border security capabilities of transit states such as Turkey, which has increased its efforts on this front. All member states of the United Nations now have a clear obligation to cooperate in this endeavor.

In September, President Obama presided over a historic meeting of the UN Security Council to oversee the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2178, which carried over 100 sponsors. This legally binding resolution requires all countries to “prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting, or equipping” of foreign fighters. It further calls on all member states to ensure their domestic laws allow for the prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters and those who knowingly facilitate them.

Several countries have already enacted or proposed new legislation to criminalize traveling to a foreign country to participate in terrorist actions; other countries have stepped up their enforcement of existing laws. Last week, I was in Berlin with General Allen as a German court for the first time sentenced an individual who had traveled to Syria to fight with ISIL to three years in prison. Other coalition partners, including Australia and the UK, have brought similar prosecutions, which we fully support.

Other nations which have previously adopted new legislation to address the foreign fighter threat include Bosnia, Albania, and Macedonia. Saudi Arabia has now issued formal decrees criminalizing ISIL and broken up ISIL cells with links to Syria. Recent arrests in Austria, Malaysia, and Kosovo also targeted foreign fighter facilitation networks. We are working with other partners in Asia and around the world to enhance legislation to close the net further.

In North Africa, Morocco is taking the lead to shine the spotlight on the threat of foreign fighters, hosting a conference next week to inaugurate the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) working group on the subject, which will focus on implementation of the “Good Practices” document, agreed in September at a GCTF meeting chaired by Secretary Kerry and Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu.

These efforts are only the start of what must be a long-term commitment to countering violent extremism and halting recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters. As recent events in Ottawa have shown, the threat of terrorists radicalized at home remains acute, and the most dangerous of all are likely those who make it to Syria and then return – after honing combat skills and committing what the UN has documented as crimes against humanity.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Stopping ISIL’s financing and funding**

ISIL derives income from a range of sources, such as oil smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, illegal taxation, antiquities smuggling, and foreign donations. Together with coalition partners we are taking a

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<sup>4</sup> See Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria, November 14, 2014 ([http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/HRC\\_CRP\\_ISIS\\_14Nov2014.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/HRC_CRP_ISIS_14Nov2014.pdf)).

holistic approach to combating ISIL's ability to generate revenues and sustain itself, including with direct military action whenever needed. Since September 23, coalition airstrikes targeted ISIL's energy infrastructure – modular refineries, petroleum storage tanks, and crude oil collection points – more than 30 times. The airstrikes have been effective and, thus far, have significantly degraded ISIL's refining capacity.

On the diplomatic front, our partners in Turkey, Iraq (including through the Kurdistan Region), and Jordan are now working to strengthen their border security and law enforcement mechanisms to prevent the flow of illicit oil refined fuel products and other smuggled goods out of and into ISIL-controlled territory.

Additionally we are using our sanctions tools to ensure that banks, companies, and citizens across the world do not engage in financial transactions with ISIL. We are working with partner nations to actively implement UN sanctions, including the UN Security Council 1267/1989 Al Qaeda Sanctions regime, which obligates all States to freeze assets, ban travel, and embargo arms from Al Qaeda-associated individuals and entities. Each of our 60 coalition partners reaffirmed their commitment to these efforts in our joint statement at last week's Ministerial in Brussels.

Precise outcomes of these efforts can be difficult to quantify, and while ISIL retains vast financial resources, there are growing signs that our efforts to combat its financing has begun to restrict its operations, including reports from Mosul that fighters are not getting paid or receiving far less than what ISIL leadership had promised. We will be working aggressively over the coming months to ensure that this trend continues.

#### **4. Addressing humanitarian crises**

With the onset of winter, the humanitarian emergency stemming from ISIL is becoming even more critical. There are now more than 2 million confirmed internally displaced persons, of which 600,000 were identified as needing critical shelter and relief items such as blankets and clothing, and half of them need urgent assistance to prepare for colder weather. Over six million Syrians require food assistance, and agencies could be forced to reduce refugee daily rations if donors do not continue to contribute generously.

These issues were front-and-center during the Brussels conference last week, where participants heard directly from UN Special Representative to the Secretary General for Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov. He made a specific appeal to help fund UN organizations operating in Iraq to serve millions of people in need. More than three billion dollars of the UN's appeals for Syrians remain unfunded in 2014 and over \$1.5 billion for the 2014-15 response in Iraq. Coalition partners agreed to provide further assistance, and we are now following up in capitals for contributions.

The United States provided over \$208 million for the humanitarian response in Iraq in Fiscal Year 14, and over \$3 billion for Syria in support of the UN-led humanitarian response since the start of the conflict in 2011. Through the UN, we are working to coordinate assistance to vulnerable populations in Iraq, Syria, and the region. The crisis, however, remains beyond the reach of any one nation or international organization to manage – and it will require a massive global response over a period of years to manage effectively.

## **5. Exposing ISIL's true nature**

Defeating ISIL ultimately requires not simply defeats on the battlefield, but also an ideological defeat: burying its false appeals to religious legitimacy and glory through rapid response messaging to expose its true nature as a barbaric and criminal enterprise devoted to mass murder of innocents. The leadership along this line of effort is being taken in the greater Middle East region where religious scholars and clerics are increasingly speaking out to directly counter ISIL's claims and doctrine.

In September, 120 Muslim scholars and leaders dismissed point-by-point speeches made by ISIL's leadership and declared its claims to a caliphate as illegitimate under Islam. In Saudi Arabia, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al Sheikh, the country's highest religious authority, condemned ISIL as the "number one enemy" of Islam and affirmed that the group could not claim to be a part of the faith. In Egypt, the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed Al Tayeb called the acts committed by ISIL "barbaric and heinous crimes" and said ISIL was adulterating Islam.

To counter ISIL's propaganda – fused with appeals to battlefield glory and claims of creating a utopian version of 7th century Islam in areas it now controls – Kuwait has led an initiative to bring together like-minded states



to share best practices through various forms of media. This initiative, led by Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Richard Stengel, is now being followed up in the UAE and we are providing support and expertise to help directly combat ISIL's social media presence.

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The best message against ISIL, however, will be its ultimate defeat, and making clear that joining the organization brings not glory or utopia on earth – but defeat on a battlefield for an unjust cause or imprisonment at home. ISIL may claim that its fighters embrace death on the battlefield, but having seen the camera footage of direct strikes on ISIL formations, that is not true. They all run for their lives whenever they hear a missile fired from a coalition aircraft screaming towards them. None outruns a missile.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This global campaign against ISIL is still in its earliest phases. Efforts to halt ISIL's advance have been successful, but the rollback phase will be longer, and progress is likely to be uneven. We have no choice, however, but to prevail – over an enemy that represents a direct threat to the United States and to the world. The comprehensive approach described above is how we will do it, in full consultation with Congress, and together with coalition partners.

It is an honor to have this opportunity to address this Committee again, and I look forward to taking your questions.

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Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Ambassador.

I think I will start with my questions and then, when Eliot arrives, he can give his opening statement and ask his. And then we will go down the line.

But, Ambassador, as you know, the Syrian city of Aleppo is the last major city there, the last refuge of the Syrian middle class, that is under the partial control of the moderate Syrian opposition as it is pushed by ISIS.

This is an absolutely critical city for the opposition for both symbolic and strategic reasons. It is through this city that most foreign humanitarian and military assistance to the people of northern Syria and the moderate opposition flows.

Yet, over the past year, as the moderate opposition has struggled to maintain its defense of this city, as better resourced fighters from ISIS, as, you know, as many as 40 air strikes a day from the Assad regime hit them, they have had to contend with Assad's use of Hezbollah fighters against them.

And so you see a situation where ISIS has gradually captured an increasing portion of the city as have other—as have those who want to extinguish this last representation of the Syrian middle-class efforts to hold on. And they are encircled, and they are defending it from within. And most observers agree that, if Aleppo falls out of moderate control, it will have catastrophic consequences for the Free Syrian Army.

So they are already on the ropes after years of anemic support. When we meet with them, we hear the same thing that you hear from them. They can't get the equipment that they need to fight back against ISIS.

So in late August, a team of State Department briefers met with committee staff, which had requested a briefing on the situation in Aleppo. The State Department officials said it was a question not of when it would fall, but—it was a question of when, not if, Aleppo would fall. I use their words. A question of when, not if, Aleppo would fall.

When our staff asked if the administration viewed preventing the fall of Aleppo as a strategic priority, the State Department said that the administration was still trying to decide if it was, which sounded like diplomatic speak for no.

And as events have played out over the past few months, it seems clear that that was the case. ISIS continues to advance on Aleppo. The barrel bombs continue to drop on the city. And this is now on a daily basis.

So, Ambassador, if we are serious about combating ISIS in Syria, we cannot let Aleppo fall. It is far more strategically important than Kobani and far more lives are at stake, yet nearly all of our air strikes are focused not in that area, but up in Kobani.

If Aleppo falls, it is likely that yet another massive wave of displaced people and refugees would result, and what is left of the opposition around the Syrian middle class will all but be destroyed.

So I will just ask you: Is preventing the fall of Aleppo an administration priority?

Ambassador MCGURK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me address that question a few ways. And we are very focused on the situation in Aleppo.

I first—I want to be clear on what our authorities are to conduct military action in Syria. Right now we are acting pursuant to requests from the Iraqi Government to the United Nations Security Council to protect them against ISIL.

So all of our kinetic operations in Syria are focused on ISIL. Where ISIL is operating in these areas, I can assure you that my DoD colleagues are looking very closely at what we can do against ISIL.

On the Aleppo situation, we are very focused on what we can do. That is why General Allen and I have made about four trips to Turkey over the last couple of months and the focus of the conversation with the Turks is how we might be able to work together to begin to improve the situation there.

We are obviously doing a number of things with the moderate opposition in these areas, which I can't discuss here. But all I can do is assure you, Mr. Chairman, that we are very focused on this situation and looking at ways to allow them to hold the line.

ISIL is north of Aleppo, kind of just south of the Turkish border. Within the city of Syria—within the city of Aleppo itself and surrounding areas, it is not so much ISIL.

But what we are focused on in terms of kinetic action, it is ISIL targets. They can be very hard to find. But we are looking at it very closely, and our conversation with Turkey is specifically focused on this question.

Chairman ROYCE. Well, that calls into question the fact that they are fighting al-Qaeda units as well, as you know. It calls into question our policy in the safe zones.

But my worry about the dithering on this is that we had these dialogues back in February on ISIS at a time—frankly, we began this dialogue before ISIS even took Fallujah, when we were calling for air strikes and action against ISIS before they managed to pull that off.

And then city by city by city the call went out from Members of Congress and by others who have experience that, if ISIS wasn't hit while their columns were on the ground, that Mosul itself would fall. And it did. And they took the central bank.

Still no action. Still discussion. Still dithering. And now we are at the point where we see the last major stronghold for the Syrian middle class trying to hold off ISIS and hold off al-Qaeda on one front and hold off the barrel bombs, and we still can't seem to see any policy that will rescue the city.

And when our—when we directly ask whether it is a strategic objective to try to hold against the fall of that city, the response we get is, "We are still trying to decide."

We can be still trying to decide after we have lost the ability to reverse what is going on in Syria, just as we lost that ability to reverse what was going on in western Iraq, because we didn't hit the targets prior to them taking Mosul.

So I—anyway, my time is expired. And we will now go to Mr. Sherman of California. We will return to Mr. Engel.

Mr. SHERMAN. Ambassador, interrupt me if I have got this wrong. But you are not saying that the U.N. Resolution or the request to the Iraqi Government gives the administration legal au-

thority under American law to deploy troops. You are relying on the various authorization to use military force.

It is also my understanding that the interpretation is that they authorized the efforts that you have taken against al-Qaeda in Syria, that you have taken against ISIS, which is a splinter—arguably, a continuing splinter of one of the many streams of al-Qaeda.

Do I have that right as to your legal position?

Ambassador MCGURK. Our international basis for operating in Syria now—

Mr. SHERMAN. I wasn't asking about your international basis. That is not legally binding. What is legally binding is the laws of Congress.

And you are not claiming that the U.N. Actions or the Iraqi actions give you authority under the War of Powers Act?

Ambassador MCGURK. No. I am saying that the situation in Aleppo is a very confused one. Our ability to look closely at what is happening there is limited by the fact that we are flying all the way from the Gulf. So our loiter time in these areas is limited.

And our focus right now is on ISIL. As you know, we are—

Mr. SHERMAN. Ambassador, I was asking you a question about the legal position of the administration, its authorization to use force, and you are telling me about how difficult it is to bomb based—you are not going to answer my questions. I want to go on to another—another question.

We have been pushed around by this Iraqi Government. We saved it. You have pointed out, I believe, that they would have taken Baghdad—or might well have taken Baghdad if it hadn't been for us.

They are terrorizing the folks at Camp Liberty without—in clear violation of not only U.S. preferences, but international law. They have allied themselves with Iran, with the Iranian Air Force carrying out attacks—operations over Iraq and Iranian ground forces operating on the ground in conjunction with Iraqi forces.

And sometimes folks at the upper levels of the State Department don't focus that much on the money of U.S. taxpayers. We are giving all this—a tremendous amount of aid to Iraq; whereas, it is my understanding that Iraq is still paying and still acknowledges its debt to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for tens of billions of dollars borrowed by Saddam Hussein.

Have you bothered—is Iraq still making payments to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia on that debt? And does that, therefore, put them in a position where, instead of paying for what we give them, often we have to give it to them for free?

Ambassador MCGURK. As I mentioned briefly in my opening testimony, the Iraqis face a very serious fiscal crisis. They are facing a \$40 billion—

Mr. SHERMAN. They face that fiscal crisis, in part, because they honor the debts to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait run up by Saddam Hussein.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, it is a very good—

Mr. SHERMAN. Have—and I have brought this up at hearings for the last 5 years in this room. I have never gotten a straight answer out of the State Department. I figured I would try it at—

Ambassador MCGURK. No. I will give you a straight answer, Congressman.

The payments to Kuwait are mandated by a Chapter VII U.N. Security Council resolution. They come to about \$1 billion a month. Iraq is obligated to pay those funds.

Mr. SHERMAN. Those are payments on Saddam Hussein's debt?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, they are payments of the 1990-1991 Gulf War reparations, but they are about \$1 billion a quarter.

Mr. SHERMAN. Well, that is the—no. I am not talking about the reparations. I am talking about the money Saddam borrowed to carry on his war against Iran, the promissory notes and bonds.

Ambassador MCGURK. Right. No. The Iraqis resist paying, as you know, the debts of Saddam Hussein because the new Iraqi Government considers themselves also a victim of Saddam Hussein, which is true.

Mr. SHERMAN. But they haven't renounced those debts. We haven't urged them to renounce those debts.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, we have. We have urged over the last decade all the debt holders from the Saddam era to renounce those debts.

Mr. SHERMAN. Well, not—you have asked the debt holders to, but you haven't had—urged Iraq to refuse to pay. It is one thing to ask the creditor, "Oh, please tear up the note." It is another thing to stand behind the debtor saying, in effect, "We don't owe the money. We are not going to pay."

Ambassador MCGURK. We are doing anything we can to help the Iraqis preserve their fiscal resources right now. That is why we are working with—

Mr. SHERMAN. Except stand up to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and void this debt, money they lent Saddam Hussein to carry on a war against Iran.

Ambassador MCGURK. If I can just—it is a slightly different issue. But, with Kuwait, we are actually in very good discussions with them. The Secretary of Defense just saw the Emir. I saw the Emir with General Allen about a month ago about relieving those payments. So we are—

Mr. SHERMAN. You are talking—you are talking about completely different payments, sir. I am talking about the debt run—

Ambassador MCGURK. They come from the same pot. They come from the same pot.

Mr. SHERMAN. They do?

Ambassador MCGURK. The Iraqis are limited in terms of their ability to fund these things.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. And I hope for the record you will brief us on what you have done to push the Iraqi regime to honor its obligations to the residents of Camp Liberty and Camp Ashraf.

Ambassador MCGURK. I would be happy to come up and give you a briefing on that. And we are working very hard on the issue. And, of course, the new Iraqi Government has been in place for 100 days, and it is much different than the previous Government. And I think we are making some progress on these issues. But I would be happy to—I would be happy to come brief you on that.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay.

Ambassador MCGURK. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. We go now to the ranking member, Mr. Eliot Engel.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, thank you. Thank you for your good work.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this important hearing on the fight against ISIS.

Though our military operation against ISIS is focused in the Middle East, the threat posed by these terrorist groups spans the globe. Recent reports indicate that ISIS is recruiting more than 1,000 foreign fighters every month. These fighters are streaming into Syria and Iraq from Europe, North Africa, the Gulf, the U.S., and other nations. Most troubling, some of them are returning to their home countries, armed with the knowledge of how to sow terror.

Just as the threat spans the globe, so must the coalition be responding to this threat. And the good news is more than 60 countries have joined the anti-ISIS coalition.

Together we are cracking down on terrorist financing, stemming the flow of foreign fighters, discrediting ISIS's false and violent ideology, providing military support to our partners, and addressing the grave humanitarian crisis that has left hundreds of thousands without homes or families.

And a significant number, including several European countries—Australia, Canada, and a number of regional partners—have worked alongside the U.S. Military to target ISIS and impede its growth.

We are making progress, but we are nowhere near to stamping out this threat. And today I hope we can discuss what strategy will get us closer to that goal.

I wanted to say, Mr. Ambassador, there are a few areas I think are especially critical.

Firstly, while we need a global coalition, it is critical that we engage closely with local partners: Iraqi and Syrian, Arab and Kurd. Such cooperation is essential to stop the spread of ISIS and to ensure that the U.S. does not bear a disproportionate share of the burden in this fight.

For years, I have supported a program to train and equip the moderate Syrian opposition which can serve as boots on the ground in Syria. Congress voted overwhelmingly to get this program off the ground. And I look forward to hearing about the status of this effort.

Secondly, we need to state clearly that there is no future for Assad in Syria and seeing Assad go remains a top priority and that the interests and the goals of the United States simply don't align with Assad or with Iran.

Assad is a brutal dictator responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Syrians. We all saw the horrific pictures smuggled out of Damascus by "Caesar," a photographer, a Syrian Army defector.

Assad is also a magnet for extremism. The conflict in Syria and Iraq will never end as long as he remains in power, courtesy of Iran and its terrorist proxy, Hezbollah.

Lastly, we must determine and understand that the U.S. plays a unique role in this situation. Our capabilities are unmatched. I understand that the American people are uneasy about getting

more involved in another conflict halfway around the globe. I feel the same way.

We are tired of war. We want to bring our men and women home, which is another reason why working with local partners is so important. It will help prevent future escalation of American involvement.

But we must not forget that, in so many places around the world, freedom, dignity, and justice are under constant attack. And I firmly believe that, if the U.S. does not lead the way as a champion of these values, no one else will.

We believe in a world in which all people are free to decide their own futures, and there are times when defending and advancing that vision requires difficult choices and sacrifice.

That is what makes the United States the world's one indispensable Nation. We didn't ask for this conflict, but we cannot ignore it. So I look forward to hearing the questions and the answers and the testimony. And I want to ask as my first question a question about Iran.

Iran also wants to defeat ISIS, but reports indicated that Iranian fighter jets were targeting ISIS in Iraq. What involvement does Iran have in Iraq both in the air and on the ground? What is their involvement with the Shia militias? And how are the Shia militias involved in the fight against ISIL? How can we prevent our best intentions in Iraq from empowering Iran? That has already happened once. We don't want it to happen again.

Ambassador MCGURK. Thank you.

Let me—there is no question that Iran is playing a role in Iraq. ISIL is a threat to Iran. And we have said that every country in the world has a role to play in defeating ISIL.

The question for the Iranians is whether they are going to do it in a constructive way that respects Iraqi sovereignty or in a destructive way that undermines Iraqi sovereignty.

Some of what we are seeing right now in terms of Iranian militias is not only problematic to—in terms of what we are seeing, it is also problematic, I know, to the new government and, also, to Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who has spoken out against any armed group operating outside the structures of the Iraqi state.

And the Iraqi Government has made a commitment that was reaffirmed before 60 countries last month in Brussels to ensure that all armed groups are operating under the structures of the Iraqi state, and that is something that the Government will be working on.

But in the total security collapse we had this summer, there is no question that militias and some armed groups filled that vacuum, that Iran has played a role in that, and it is something that the new Government will have to—will have to—have to begin to work on.

Mr. ENGEL. I just think—I just think—and then I will yield back—that we need to be very wary of Iran. It is not simply the enemy of my enemy is my friend. And I think we need to be very, very careful not to—not to stumble down that path.

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you.

We go to Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chair of the Middle East subcommittee.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Good to have you back, Ambassador.

Following up on Mr. Engel's questions regarding Iran, the Secretary has stated quite clearly that the United States is not coordinating with Iran on Iraq and on the fight against ISIL. And, in addition, in your 15-page testimony, you don't mention Iran even a single time, yet the regime clearly has a role that it is playing in Iraq, as you just stated. Prime Minister Abadi has claimed no knowledge of the recent air strikes, but Iran has confirmed that it did carry them out.

So who currently controls the air space in Iraq, given that the Iraqis don't have sufficient capabilities to maintain their own air sovereignty? And if no coordination had taken place and the Iranians did, indeed, take this action into their own hands without coordinating, didn't Iran violate Iraqi air space? Will there be any repercussions from that?

As we continue our nuclear talks with Iran, we ignore multiple violations that Iran continues to make as the talks take place. Will this be yet another violation of Iran that we turn a blind eye to?

The Secretary has called—called possible Iranian action in Iraq against ISIL as positive despite the fact that Tehran's incessant meddling in Baghdad and its stoking of sectarian tension in Iraq and in Syria has played a large part in the rise of ISIL.

Is it the administration's view that having a Shiite Iran, the world's foremost supporter of terrorism, in spite of our nuclear talks, invade Iraqi air space to attack Sunni ISIL—does the administration view this as a positive development?

And, on Syria, you testified that it is our goal, not that it is an absolute necessity, to find a future in Syria that does not include ISIL or Assad, as you stated in your testimony, and that we are relying on moderate rebels to defeat them both and usher in a political settlement.

Will the Assad regime being supported by Iran and Russia as they are and with ISIL being so well financed—how will a group of rebels be able to defeat them both? And what would they need in order to accomplish that goal?

The administration doesn't have a comprehensive policy to deal with all of the threats in Iraq and Syria and Iran, nor does it seem to want one. These aren't realistic plans that can truly destroy ISIL, can defeat al-Nusra, and defeat the Assad regime. We haven't even begun the train-and-equip mission, and we are about a year away from even standing that minimal force up, if ever at all.

Is that the case? Where are we with that mission, sir?

Ambassador MCGURK. Let me address your questions briefly.

First, in my testimony, I did focus on the concern about the militias and Prime Minister Abadi's commitment in Brussels to begin to rein those in, all armed groups within the structures of the state.

I also focused on the desire of this new Government to have strategic independence in the region, and that gets to his outreach his Arab neighbors and, also, the important outreach to Ankara, which



is happening now, which was not happening over the past few years.

That is very important. Iran is a fact in Iraq. You just have to look at a border—at a map to see that with a 1,500 kilometer border. And as we speak right now, there is 500—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Excuse me, sir.

Would you say that Iran violated Iraqi air space?

Ambassador MCGURK. I would have to defer to some of my DoD colleagues about what exactly happened there. I know that was a—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. If they did, would there be any consequences for that violation, one of many?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, it is up to the Iraqi Government to control its own air space. But, as you said, they lack the assets and resources to do that.

I would mention on that score the F-16 program is moving forward. The Iraqis have allocated funds for it. The pilots are in training. And we are working with Jordan, actually, to house those F-16s on a temporary basis before the bases in Iraq are ready.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And, if I could in just the few seconds we have left, on Syria, what is the latest with the train-and-equip mission? It doesn't seem that we have come very far.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, as you know, that is a Title 10 DoD program, and my DoD colleagues can give you a very substantial briefing on that.

General Allen and I have been to the—some of the host countries, such as Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, about the progress in getting the sites up and running.

We hope, with the progress that Congress is making this week, that we can get those programs moving as early as March with the training to begin.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And is it the administration's view still, as you stated, that Assad must go? Does that mean that he must be removed from power or are you just saying he should not have a future in Syria?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, we are focused on a political transition process. And there are two political tracks going on right now. One is led by Staffan de Mistura.

The U.N. Special Representative is looking at a bottom-up approach, getting to the chairman's question on Aleppo. He is very focused on freezing the situation in Aleppo. We very much support that initiative.

And, also, Secretary Kerry has been in conversations with key stakeholders in the region about regenerating a new political track. But clearly nobody believes that Bashar al-Assad can govern that state and bring it to any sense of stability—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Do you think that the rebels are going to remove him from power?

Ambassador MCGURK. Excuse me?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Will the rebels remove him from power? Who is going to remove Assad from power?

Ambassador MCGURK. Again, my DoD colleagues could discuss the military situation. But we do not see a situation in which the

rebels are able to remove him from power. It will have to be a negotiated diplomatic process.

Chairman ROYCE. Just regarding the Syria train-and-equip program, it is unfortunate that the DoD did not make available—was unable to make—to provide a witness today. We had made the request.

We go now to Mr. Meeks of New York.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this important hearing.

And thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for being here.

You know, as I am sitting listening to your testimony and listening to the questions that are being asked, I understand that this is a complicated situation. It has been since we have been here. It is not easy. People have relationships in that region, some for decades, some for centuries, against one another, different interests, and we are trying to navigate all of that. This is not a simple scenario.

I can recall being at this hearing—in this hearing room before where, for many of us, it was easy for us to be up here to think that it is simple. We thought it was simple to get rid of Saddam Hussein. We said that it would take just a few days. In fact, we got on a ship and said mission accomplished a few days after shock and awe.

I am glad we are not being that simplistic about this. The administration has been honest to say that it will take years to get this done and to get it done right, not based upon emotion, not based upon trying just to get us together so that we can say rah-rah, but based on trying to get together with our allies in the region, those that got complicated relationships, so that we can try to figure out once and for all how do we get this thing done without it just being stuck on just the United States and everybody then turning back against us.

So it is complicated. It is going to take some time. We have got to figure this out. We have had some problems. That is what happens with complicated situations. It is not easy. If it was easy, anybody could do it. And so it is not easy for the United States of America. And when you look at this world that is smaller, you know, we got to deal with our—all of our other allies in the region who have their interests, also.

And in today's world, they are not just saying, "Oh, we are going to just do what the United States says against our own self-interest." They have their self-interest, also. And we got to figure out how we weigh that in so that we can knit and weave and put this thing together so that we don't have an artificial result that only lasts for a short period of time. So I understand that it is difficult.

And so my first question is going toward what has been difficult with the Iraqi Government—past Government. And I know there has just been an agreement with Baghdad and Erbil. And so my question is: How is that?

Because I know that, you know, when you look at Kurdistan—and that is, you know, a difficult situation there, et cetera, historically—and we—and the Maliki government, we—you know, they were not doing the right thing so that the—Kurdistan was getting some of the dollars that it needed from the central government.

So could you tell me, how is this landmark agreement that was reached—I think it was just reached last week, again, between the central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

You know, what is their—what is the likelihood that it will hold? And how will payments be made to the Kurds so that we could try to fix this scenario that has been also, historically, something that has been a problem in the past?

Ambassador MCGURK. Thank you for your excellent question.

And you are absolutely right. This is an extremely complicated situation. It is viewed differently from every capital we go to. It is viewed differently from different groups within the countries that face—in the conflict zone.

And the Middle East right now is going through a historic transformation. It is up to us to define American interests very acutely and then protect and advance those interests, which we are working to do with our coalition partners.

The oil deal is really significant because it is something we have worked on for almost 10 years. We almost got there back in March. The terms of the deal that was reached last week was the same deal that was on the table in March, but simply couldn't get over the line with the Government that was in place back then.

The new Government, as I mentioned in my testimony, is totally different across the board, more pragmatic actors, and people are able to get together around a table and actually figure it out, and they figured out a win-win solution.

And under this solution, the Kurdistan region will export about 550,000 barrels a day, 300,000 barrels coming from Kirkuk. And if you know Iraq, that is a very controversial part of the landscape. But taking oil from those fields and exporting it through the north, through the Kurdistan region and then to Ceyhan in Turkey, about 300,000 barrels from Kirkuk. All of that revenue will come into the central account, and 17 percent of it will go to the Kurdistan region. It is a breakthrough accord.

And another part of it is \$1 billion within the new budget will go to the Kurdish Peshmerga. So for the first time, the Iraqi Government is very clearly saying, "We will fund our brave Kurdish Peshmerga fighters who are fighting alongside us against ISIL." This is a big deal. It is a breakthrough.

Now, will there be problems in implementation as we move forward? Yes. And we will have to work through those, and the Iraqis will work through those. But it is a significant sign that they got this done. It is a very hopeful moment.

And I was on the phone with the Iraqi leadership in Baghdad, with the Kurdish leadership in Erbil, very shortly after, and there was really a mood of tremendous optimism, something I have not heard in some time, and I have worked on this specific issue for a period of years.

So I think your question is a very insightful one. And I think the oil agreement is just indicative of where we are in Iraq and the foundation that we have built, given where we were 6 months ago today. It was hard to see back then where we might be today, but it really gives us some hope for the future.

But, again, Iraqis will have to work out the details. It will be difficult. There will be setbacks, as you said. There is never anything

lingering here. Nothing is easy. It is complex. But it is a—it was a significant breakthrough and a testament to the Iraqi leadership to really get it done.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Joe Wilson of South Carolina.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Chairman Royce, for your determined leadership. And, Chairman Royce, thank you also for your early warnings of the threat of ISIS to American families.

And, Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much for being here today.

The American people need to know the threat of the murderous ideology of ISIS. Last week ABC News reported an ISIS spokesman, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, called upon followers in the U.S. and Europe to attack members of the military.

He went on to say, “Do not ask for anyone’s advice and do not seek anyone’s verdict. Kill the disbeliever, whether he is a civilian or military, for they have the same ruling. Both of them are disbelievers. Both of them are considered to be waging war.”

This is a grotesque ideology that we face and our coalition partners face, and I believe it is important that we never forget how grotesque it is. Additionally, we need to know that jihadists carry signs in English that are very clear, “Death to America,” “Death to Israel.” Their creed of mass murder is, “We believe in death more than you value life.”

Having that in mind again, you have got quite a challenge, but we do have allies. And I am particularly grateful. The Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq has been a success story of economic development for its people and as opposition to extremists. The American no-fly zone saved thousands of lives.

The administration claims the Kurdish Peshmerga are our primary U.S. partners in the efforts against the Islamic state; yet, as of mid-October, the administration has only provided rifles, small arms, ammunition, mortars, and RPGs to the Kurdish forces.

I am really concerned that the President’s actions don’t match the threat. Does the administration intend to be more robust in equipping the Kurdish forces to commence offensive operations against ISIS? And under what timeline?

Ambassador MCGURK. Let me discuss the situation of arming the Peshmerga because I have been involved in it. And I think we have worked out with them two detailed lists, one in August and one in September, and then with this Government of Iraq. And we have delivered everything on those lists.

And, again, I just want to go back to the fact that we have a new Government now. Every request for weapons systems from the Kurdistan region has been approved by the new Government.

We have a new Minister of Defense. He is a Sunni Arab from Mosul. One of his first trips was going up to Erbil to see President Barzani, and he has committed to getting the supplies to the Kurds that they need.

I was just in Berlin last week. The Germans are supplying the Peshmerga, with the consent of the Government of Iraq, significant antitank munitions.

So we are very focused on this. We are acutely focused on it. But what is important is that, unlike some of the tension we had with the last Government, we have very strong cooperation now.

There has been about 40 cargo flights. They land in Baghdad first, but then they immediately go into Erbil to supply the Peshmerga with the weapons and the support that they need. So we are working on this every day.

We have our joint operation centers set up in the Kurdistan region. I have been to them. I went to Dohuk to see President Barzani when he was commanding some of his units in an offensive near the Erbil border crossing.

And we are working with them every day. But we worked through this, and our military colleagues worked through, "What are the requirements? What do you need? How do we get them?"

We have went around the world to source getting T-62 tank rounds to make sure that the 100 tanks that the Kurds have, Soviet air tanks, which are pretty devastating against ISIL, are fully resourced with the ammunition that they need.

So this is an ongoing day-to-day activity, and we are fully seized of it.

Mr. WILSON. And do you anticipate that the Peshmerga would be on offensive operations and not just defensive?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, they are on offensive operations, Congressman. They have taken back nearly all the territory that was seized from ISIL when ISIL launched its offensive in August, the one exception being Sinjar, and we think that that will kick off after the winter season.

And the Peshmerga—importantly, they are working very closely with Iraqi forces to take back the Mosul Dam. The Kurdish—the Iraqi Government's counterterrorism service was working side by side with the Peshmerga to take back the Mosul Dam. And the operation at the Erbil border crossing was done in coordination with Sunni Arabs tribes in that area.

So it is a significant development. Again, given where we were 6 months ago and given where we were after ISIL moved into the Kurdistan region, the Kurds have pushed back very effectively. They have taken hundreds of casualties, as have the Iraqi security force, and you have remember that.

And we are working with them in our joint operation centers to help plan and conduct operations and, when they mount their operations, we provide them with air cover and air support.

Mr. WILSON. And I want to join with my colleague from Queens, actually a native of South Carolina, and point out how pleased I am that there has been an agreement in regard to oil between Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government.

I yield the balance of my time.

Ambassador MCGURK. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. We go now to Albio Sires of New Jersey.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and thank you for being here with us and always being straightforward with us.

You know, as I sit here in these hearings and we talk about re-training and training—and I just read a report about 2 or 3 weeks ago where they had—the Iraqis had 50,000 soldiers that were on

the payroll that never showed up. I mean, to me, this is what we are going to try to retrain again and spend billions of dollars and maybe not be as effective as they were.

The other thing is, you know, we talk about a new Government being more pragmatic. I think it is just the reality that has hit them that, if they really don't work and change their ways, they are going to lose their country.

I mean, people have poured billions of dollars into this country to try to straighten them out and, well, now they become pragmatic. I think it is just a reality that has hit them that they have to.

And, you know, implementation of some of these accords—I was concerned with the Kurdish getting all the weapons that they needed, but they had to go through Baghdad. So it was difficult for them to get it to the Kurdish. I mean, these are the kind of things.

And the last thing I will just talk about is spreading the conflict in the area. I read some articles where Lebanon was concerned that there was activity in Lebanon and they are asking for more arms, you know, and more support. So could you speak to that also.

Thank you very much.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, Lebanon was a participant at the—at the conference we had in Brussels last week, at the Coalition Ministerial chaired by Secretary Kerry. They were at the table with their foreign minister, as were the other neighbors.

Turkey, for example, has 1.8 million refugees from Syria. And we have to remember that the burden that that is taking on Turkey and Lebanon and Jordan is a tremendous toll. So we are doing all we possibly can to help shore them up, but it is extremely difficult.

And, again, the Lebanese are very concerned about this, in particular, the inroads that ISIL is making into some of its border regions and the al-Nusra Front, which is holding some Lebanese soldiers and tragically executed one of them last week.

So all of our partners in the region, the countries neighboring Syria—Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Jordan—are central to the efforts of this coalition, and what we heard in Brussels around the table, 60 different members of the coalition, countries from all around the world, talking about the fact that we need to help our friends who are suffering from this crisis.

So we are very focused on it. And I can come follow up with a more detailed briefing, particularly on Lebanon or other neighbors.

Mr. SIRE. Well, I am happy you raised the issue with Jordan because I understand that they are getting more aggressive—more active in demonstrations and aggressive activities.

Can you talk a little bit about that.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, you know, Jordan is also a frontline state and, as you know, the refugees that they have taken in has really taken a toll on their resources.

King Abdullah was just here. I think it was last week. General Allen and I saw him in Oman about a month ago working very closely with Jordan both on the security side about shoring up the defenses of their border and, also, in trying to limit the extremist presence in southeast Syria.

There is a lot of focus on the Aleppo pocket in northern Syria, which is a focus of the Turks and us and everyone. But Jordan is

very focused on the other regions of Syria on their border where ISIL has a tremendous presence, and we need to help them.

But Jordan is a frontline state, and that is where we are providing them substantial security assistance and, also, humanitarian assistance to deal with the refugee crisis.

But, again, our friends in the region—Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq—are just impacted by this crisis every day, and that is why part of the President's central policy in this counterterrorism support and building partner capacity is focused on this very issue, the neighbors of Syria and making sure that they can withstand this crisis the best they can.

Mr. SIRE. Can you talk a little bit about Camp Liberty and any of the abuses by the Iraqis. I know you are on the discussion.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, I get a briefing on this every single day, and I get reports from both the residents and, also, from the United Nations. And, as you know, the United Nations monitoring teams confirms to us about humanitarian supplies and the overall situation at the camp. We look at it every single day.

My colleague Jonathan Winer, who is our senior advisor on the MEK resettlement, he is in Albania today with a team—inter-agency team with DHS represented as well. And we have gotten about 600 residents of Camp Liberty out of Camp Liberty and out of Iraq to safety over the past year, and we are looking to increase that number this year.

And Albania has been very helpful in this regard. And Jonathan Winer has really done a tremendous, heroic, courageous job at getting this moving. And I think the new Government will be more cooperative.

And we want to get all of the residents of Camp Liberty that testified here before out of Iraq to safety. That is our goal. And we are working with partners around the world to try to achieve that goal.

And right now Albania has been extremely cooperative, and we should thank them for taking in hundreds of residents. And the residents are assimilating quite well in Albania.

But Jonathan, my colleague, Mr. Winer, is there now discussing this issue, and I am sure he would be happy to come follow up with you.

Mr. SIRE. Thank you very much.

Chairman ROYCE. Per that issue, I would just point out when Senator Kerry was here, we raised this issue of, you know, on supporting the Kurds, not selling them the heavy weapons, the heavy equipment, and the armor they needed, the antitank missiles, the NED. I quote from his testimony. He said, "You said the administration is responsible for sending all these weapons through Baghdad. No. We are not. You are. We are adhering to U.S. law passed by Congress. If you want to change it, fix it, we invite you."

I would just point out that I put out bipartisan legislation to change that to allow us to directly sell the weapons they needed to the Kurds, and then the administration opposed the legislation that we had been invited to put in to change it. So just for the record, I would raise the point that the argument has changed.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Chairman, I feel your pain on Crimea, too.

Chairman ROYCE. Yes. It is a moving target and a moving argument.

We go now to Judge Poe of Texas.

Mr. POE. I thank the chairman.

There is no question about it that ISIS, as I call them, they are a bunch of bad people who just commit murder, and we are doing battle with ISIS. The United States has been in the Middle East with boots on the ground for a long time.

Ambassador, would you say that the United States is at war with ISIS or not?

Ambassador MCGURK. Congressman, having seen it up close, I would say we are at war with ISIS, yes.

Mr. POE. It seems to me that our strategy is twofold at this point, or maybe threefold. Send aid to different groups, countries. They are 60 something nations that I understand are in the coalition to fight ISIS. One is to do air strikes. As the chairman has mentioned, the success of those air strikes depends on who you are talking to. I do not believe they have been quite as successful as we had hoped they would be. The other is to take Syrian moderate rebels, vet, train, and equip them to go back to Syria and defeat ISIS.

How many of those people have been vetted, trained, and equipped and sent back to Syria to fight ISIS?

Ambassador MCGURK. Congressman, again, I have to—it is a DoD program and they can—

Mr. POE. It is none. Isn't it correct, Ambassador? I mean, you are the Ambassador. You represent the State Department of the United States. We are at war with this country—or at war with ISIS. You can't tell me politically whether we have armed—vetted, armed and trained anybody yet and sent them back to Syria to fight ISIS? You can't give that answer?

Ambassador MCGURK. No. I can answer that question. I think I did answer it. The answer right now is no, and—

Mr. POE. So none.

Ambassador MCGURK [continuing]. It was designed—it was designed to be a long-term program, and we hope—

Mr. POE. I understand, Ambassador. No. You wait a minute. I am asking the questions. You give the answer.

The answer is we have not trained any and none of them are back over there. Meanwhile, ISIS is beheading people and committing all kinds of atrocities, but our plan, if I understand our strategic plan, it is to help aid, it is to drop bombs, it is to train mercenaries to go back and fight ISIS in Syria, none of which have been trained.

How long is it going to take before we get all those people that are being trained in Saudi Arabia back in Syria to fight? How long do you think it will take?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, Congressman, the program is to train 5,000 per year, and the training, we hope, will start in March. So—

Mr. POE. So a year from March?

Ambassador MCGURK. And the program is to build—

Mr. POE. A year from March?



Ambassador MCGURK. About 5,000 by then. We have to be very——

Mr. POE. Excuse me, Ambassador. I am not clear.

Will it be 5,000 in March that will be trained. Or will it be a year from March 2016 before we have those 5,000 fighters that we send back to Syria?

Ambassador MCGURK. It is 5,000 trained per year, and part of the reason is because of the vetting standards and that we are being very careful about this, but we are not sitting on our hands watching——

Mr. POE. Excuse me, Mr. Ambassador. Answer the question.

Is it 5,000 in 2016 in March where we hope that is our plan to have them trained by then?

Ambassador MCGURK. The training, we hope, will begin in March. So it is——

Mr. POE. But it will take a year to train 5,000 people.

Ambassador MCGURK. Yes. That is right.

Mr. POE. So March 2016, then we have a plan; then we have fighters; then we send them to Syria. There is no telling what ISIS can do in that year and however many months it is.

Does the United States have some other strategic plan other than arming these folks that aren't going to show up until 2016, dropping bombs that are marginal whether they have been successful and helping with military aid to some of these coalition countries? Is there a strategic plan overall that you know about in the State Department?

Ambassador MCGURK. Yes. The train and equip program is one small element in an overall campaign, and this is a multiyear campaign, and phase 1—phase 1 is Iraq. What we are doing in Syria right now is degrading ISIL's capacity, and every time we have had a local force on the ground that we can work with, and Kobani is a good example of this, we are working with free Syrian——

Mr. POE. Reclaiming my time.

What are we doing in Syria right now? I mean, people are dying in Syria, and the calvary isn't showing up until 2016, the way I understand it. Is that correct?

Ambassador MCGURK. Those trained and equipped units are not the only units on the field that we can work with in Syria, Congressman.

Mr. POE. Who else are we working with in Syria.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, we are working right now in Kobani with a number of units, and we are killing about 100 fighters——

Mr. POE. Who are these people we are working with?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga, thanks to a deal we worked out with the Turks to open up a corridor from the Kurdistan region, and they——

Mr. POE. Are they working in Syria or are they working in Iraq?

Ambassador MCGURK. In Syria. We brought Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga from Iraq into Kobani.

Mr. POE. Last question. I am sorry. I am out of time.

Last question: Are we going to put more boots on the ground, American military, in the Middle East to defeat ISIS?

Ambassador MCGURK. The President's policy is not to put combat forces on the ground in Iraq, but we have advisors, trainers——

Mr. POE. Be careful right now. Middle East. I am not going to talk about Iraq. In the Middle East, are more Americans going over to the Middle East to defeat and fight ISIS?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, we have about 30,000 troops in the region now.

Mr. POE. Are more Americans going over to the Middle East to defeat and fight ISIS, other than what is already there?

Ambassador MCGURK. Again, right now, I think we have a pretty large substantial force deployment in the Middle East. I don't see the need for more right now, but, again, I have to defer to my DoD colleagues—

Mr. POE. DoD because you don't know.

I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Gentleman from Fairfax, Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ambassador, certainly I think most of us wish success in your endeavor, but I have to confess to you, listening to you makes one, you know, feel that one is in a scene in the Wizard of Oz where we are being counseled to pay no attention to that man behind the curtain, meaning the previous Iraqi Government, which we supported way too long, in terms of Maliki and the damage he did in absolutely severing relations between the Shia and the Sunni, which contributed mightily to the rise of ISIS and, frankly, to the loss of moderates, not only in Iraq but spill over in Syria.

I mean, you said to us, you know, pay attention to the fact that we have a new government. Yeah. It is kind of relatively new, but when one looks at measures of progress, one despairs, frankly, Ambassador McGurk. I mean, I am fixated on what constitutes progress. We have used metrics in the past about how many Iraqi troops we trained. Well, how did that work out for us? They melted away, and now we have ISIS as one of the best-funded, best-equipped terrorist organizations on the planet, thanks to U.S. assistance—not because we intended it but because our ally in Iraq collapsed comprehensively.

Now we are talking about, well, maybe what we have to do is have a smaller, you know, fast force that can go in. We will train them. We won't train hundreds of thousands. And they will do it.

You have talked, in response to Judge Poe, about the training. We all hope that works, but I don't think—I don't know anyone who seriously thinks that you can train effectively, even with successful vetting, 5,000 insurgents who are moderate and maybe secular, and they are going to be reintroduced to Syria and turn the tide. In fact, all of the indications are the moderate, you know, part of the insurgency, such as it is, has collapsed in Syria, is actually losing ground catastrophically, almost to the point of extinction.

And so you cited decentralization, security reforms and the fact that the new government is reaching out finally to regional capitals, as if that is going to turn the tide. Maybe you didn't intend for that, but I guess I would like to see efficacious metrics with respect to the subject of this hearing, which is, are we making progress?

How do we measure progress in an efficacious way, not a feel-good way, not a check-the-box way? How do we actually measure progress, given the fact that this administration has said the end

goal with respect to ISIS is its destruction? Not deterring it, not pushing it back—its destruction. I don't hear anything from your testimony, and I hear nothing in the so-called metrics of progress reported here today that would give me or, frankly, anyone at this dais confidence that we know what we are doing and that we have any fair chance at all to return to the Wizard of Oz and it actually be a powerful wizard. I just don't see it.

Could you please comment on the metrics we have got and the reason we should be confident that those metrics will lead to "progress"?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, it is a very good question, and we try to take an empirical data-driven approach as much as possible to what is a very complex situation.

I mean, one data I look at every month are the suicide bombers coming into Iraq, and we have had about—we went from 5 to 10 a year in 2011, 2012. It went up to 30—almost 30—5 to 10 a month in 2011, 2012. Went up almost to 30 a month, sometimes 50 a month.

The month before the Iraqi elections in April we had 50. It is coming down, when I look at the indicators. I can't tell you right now if that is a trend or if that is simply an anomaly, but right now, it is coming down.

We are looking to see the reforms that this new government is making, and without an Iraqi commitment long term, we probably won't succeed, but if you look at what the government has done in 100 days: It has abolished the office of the commander in chief, which was an irritant to the Sunnis and also which centralized all security responsibility in the office of the prime minister. It has terminated almost three dozen problematic security commanders. It has identified, as it has said, 50,000 ghost soldiers on the roles, which is an anti-corruption mechanism. So it is taking steps that we wanted to have taken.

To change the government, Congressman, we couldn't just say, You know what, we have to have a new government. We had to get to elections. Iraqi had—they had elections on April 30th, earlier this year. For those elections to happen, we had to work over the course of 2013 to get the election system in place, to get the mechanism in place, and to have U.N. Oversight to make sure that they were genuine and credible. Those elections did happen on April 30th, and they set the conditions to get to a new government.

So this is really a multiyear process, but we have a new government now, and it is taking some measures that we find promising—

Mr. CONNOLLY. As I said, Mr. Ambassador, I want you to succeed. I hope you succeed, but just as I think some of the criticism of the administration with respect to Syria was very facile—and I single out two prominent members of the other body who are all too quick to say they were easy answers and the administration wasn't doing enough, as if we knew who to support in Syria. But, similarly, we on our side cannot be overly facile either in the difficulties we face and the goals we set for ourselves, and I am very fearful at the end of the day that those goals are not realizable; they are not realistic; and we can't really set up metrics that are efficacious.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My time is up.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Matt Salmon of Arizona over.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ambassador, I apologize. I am just getting my voice back. You are probably going to be real thankful about that, but the fact is I think many members today on both sides of the aisle have expressed concerns that maybe the administration's posture is more defensive than offensive, and that, as such, the ISIS controls roughly as much property as they did 5 months ago or territories they did 5 months ago. The President described the training of the Free Syrian Army as the tip of the spear on the ground game, and we are learning that they are not even going to start the training until March of next year.

Now, yesterday, the Secretary left the door open for U.S. ground troops at the Senate Armed—or excuse me, Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, and for the record, that is a pivot. You have stated that the President has promised over and over again, we didn't even need to have you say that. We have heard him say the same things, and I believe that ultimately U.S. Ground troops are going to be essential to completely defeat and not just contain ISIL, as I believe the current administration policy is.

So my first question is, when can we expect the administration to come to Congress for an authorization for the use of military force, and I don't believe that the one that was passed 10 years ago is adequate. This isn't a hybrid. I do want to do everything within my power, as I believe other members have said, of eradicating and defeating ISIS and not just containing them.

My second question is that recent reports indicate that our allies are concerned about the U.S. commitment to this fight, and some are threatening to withdraw from the coalition. What are we going to do to reassure them and keep them in the coalition? And what are we going to do to get back on the offense and not so much on the defense?

Those are my questions.

Ambassador MCGURK. On the AUMF, Congressman, as you know, Secretary Kerry devoted an entire session to this yesterday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he made clear that we are prepared to work very closely with the Congress. There is legislation being drafted in the Senate, particularly from Chairman Menendez, which the Secretary has said we are willing to work on and we find some very promising elements there. I think the Secretary was also pretty clear that the President has been clear that his policy is that U.S. military forces will not be deployed to conduct ground combat operations against ISIL. That is the policy of the administration. We also don't want to tie the hands of the commander in chief given a very uncertain environment, and you could face an exigent situation. But this will come within the give and take with Congress about what the actual terminology of the AUMF will be.

In terms of the coalition, this is why it was important that we had this conference in Brussels last week, because we brought every member of the coalition together. They signed a—joined a very detailed joint statement, which lays out the way forward, and I will make sure you have that if you haven't seen it. And it is sig-

nificant because it brought countries from all around the world around the same table focused on the same problem and about how to proceed.

So that is the kind of initiative that could help keep the coalition together. And General Allen and I in our travels are very focused on this, and there is going to be a lot more over the next month in terms of coalition management and keeping it together, but right now, I would think the commitment is very firm.

In terms of offense, I just have to say—I mean, the last time I testified here, we had done no air strikes. That wasn't too long ago. We have now done, last I just looked, I got the most recent numbers, 1,219 air strikes; 689 in Iraq and 530 in Syria. Our coalition partners have done 208 of those air strikes, and what is different, I think, about past campaigns is that our air strikes now are focused on very precise intelligence. And we are striking with pretty devastating effect, and to date—and, you know, we have to be very careful about this, but we have been very careful about making sure we have no civilian casualties in these attacks, and that is something that—I saw General Austin in Bahrain just on Sunday for about an hour talking about the state of the overall campaign, and he is very focused on that because we want to keep the population, as much as possible, on our side, and our strikes to date have been very precise, very effective. And I can just tell you by getting the reports every morning, we are hitting the targets we seek to hit. We are hitting the leadership targets. We are hitting the mobile refineries. We have hit about 22 of them, which is really impacting ISIL's ability to finance itself. We are hitting the command and control cells.

We have completely destroyed ISIL's ability to amass and maneuver force, and what it was able to do so effectively up until Mosul and up until this summer, it masses force. They would do these swarming maneuver tactics with heavy armored vehicles and basically overrun anything in its wake. It can't do that anymore, and that, to me, is an empirical sign of progress that we are making, but we have to keep at it.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [presiding]. Gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Higgins of New York is recognized.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Ambassador, you had indicated earlier that the deal between Prime Minister Abadi and the Kurds in Erbil was a big deal, that the central government in Baghdad will permanently resume payments to Kurdistan, representing 17 percent of the national budget, including \$1 billion to pay for the salaries of the Peshmerga and weapons for them as well.

And why is it important? Because, to date, there hasn't been an effective countervailing fighting force in Iraq. Now there appears to be. The Peshmerga estimates are about 190 fighters. They have proven to be reliable. They are experienced, and they have also proven to be reliable allies to the United States in our involvement in Iraq.

Iraqi officials now want to push for a winter offensive in Mosul, and American officials, it has been reported, are concerned that this schedule is a little bit too ambitious.

Can you explain that?

Ambassador MCGURK. Let me first say, on the Peshmerga, I think one additional point I want to make of the Peshmerga, addressing your question and about how we are kind of in a new era here, part of our plan is to train and equip, as you know, 12 Iraqi brigades. Three of those would be Kurdish Peshmerga, and those units will receive the same Western weapons, vehicles, equipment as the Iraqi units that we are training and equipping. And this is all done in cooperation between—between Baghdad and Erbil. So I think that is a significant point to put on the record.

In terms of Mosul, again, it is an ongoing discussion we have with the Iraqis and our military colleagues who are in the field about how best to prosecute this campaign. I would just caution that I think we have to be very prudent in our expectations, and the one thing we want to do is manage expectations. I have said repeatedly, the President has said, the Secretary has said this will be a multiyear campaign, and nobody wants to rush into Mosul or a city that is held by ISIL before the conditions have been set. So it is an ongoing conversation with the Iraqis about how to proceed, when to proceed, when to proceed in one area and not another.

Mr. HIGGINS. Toward the goal of managing expectations, then, how many ISIS fighters are in and around Mosul today?

Ambassador MCGURK. It is hard to say. We think it is probably, the last I have seen, in the low thousands. The leaders in Mosul and Ninawa we believe we have taken off the battlefield.

Mr. HIGGINS. Give me that number again, estimate.

Ambassador MCGURK. The last I have seen are the low thousands.

Mr. HIGGINS. Meaning what? 3,000?

Ambassador MCGURK. I can't give you a precise number, but that sounds about right.

Mr. HIGGINS. Okay. This hybrid force that you talk about between ISIL and the—or between the Peshmerga and the Iraqi National Army would represent 20,000, 25,000 fighters.

Ambassador MCGURK. Roughly, depending on how you count the size of a brigade.

Mr. HIGGINS. 20,000, 25,000 is an responsible estimate.

Ambassador MCGURK. It is reasonable.

Mr. HIGGINS. Pardon me?

Ambassador MCGURK. Reasonable.

Mr. HIGGINS. What is the size or the population of the City of Mosul?

Ambassador MCGURK. It is about 1.5 million.

Mr. HIGGINS. 1.5 million. And we don't believe that a winter of offensive is advisable right now because the hybrid fighting force is not ready yet, hasn't had the proper training?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, we want to set the conditions before. I mean, one thing we have learned is that you don't want to move into—

Mr. HIGGINS. And what are the conditions?

Ambassador MCGURK [continuing]. An urban combat environment before the conditions have been set.

Well, you are going to work with the local population. We are working, in fact, with the governor of Ninawa Province and other local leaders in Ninawa who are now located in regions—in areas

right near Mosul, but in terms of making sure that a police force is set and making sure that once ISIL is kicked out of Mosul, that there is something to maintain law and order and bring services and stability to the community there, which will have been suffering under ISIL's rule for some time.

The point is you have to get this right. You can't just rush into it, and that is why I want to—that is why we have these joint operation centers and are working day after day hand in glove with the Iraqis to plan these operations.

Mr. HIGGINS. Would you characterize ISIS as being on the defensive in Mosul right now?

Ambassador MCGURK. It is hard to say. It is hard to say. It certainly—

Mr. HIGGINS. Has their momentum been broken?

Ambassador MCGURK. I think there are signs that the tide is beginning to turn, that the population is turning on them, but—

Mr. HIGGINS. Has that hurt the recruiting efforts?

Ambassador MCGURK. Again, it is hard to say, but there are enough signs that they are having a hard time in Mosul, specifically paying their fighters. They are having a hard time getting fuel.

You know, the Baiji refinery, Congressman, they tried to seize the Baiji refinery starting in June. They needed the Baiji refinery for the fuel they would need to make sure that Mosul had the lights on. They failed in seizing the Baiji refinery. There was a very heroic defense put up by Iraqi fighters for 6 months in the Baiji refinery, and Iraqi forces just a couple weeks ago, with our help, were able to break that siege, and ISIL now has no chance of seizing the Baiji refinery.

Mr. HIGGINS. My time has expired. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Marino of Pennsylvania is recognized.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Ambassador. It is good to see you again, and as we say in Pennsylvania, your position is—you are between a rock and a hard place here with us and the talks that are going on at the White House.

I am a member of the NATO Parliamentary Alliance and routinely get comments from our members asking, is the President taking this seriously? Is the President taking ISIS seriously? And after listening to Senator Kerry's testimony just recently, I get the impression—and I am just assuming you folks may be frustrated, too—but the President is trying to micromanage this and not listening to you and to the military personnel. I do speak up to my other NATO colleagues and say, "Anytime you want to join in and contribute, we would be more than glad to have you onboard."

But, with that said, you know, we didn't attack ISIS when they were leaving Syria going into Iraq. I think that was—I think that was a major mistake, and I want to ask you—and I know what you talk about in the Oval Office and what you can say here, not by your choice, may be a little different, but we made a mistake by not doing that. Would you agree with me?

Ambassador MCGURK. I—what is your question?

Mr. MARINO. By not attacking ISIS when they were leaving, because remember, the President said in an interview with The New Yorker magazine that, you know, they were junior varsity basketball players. What has changed that they are not junior varsity anymore, and why did we not—was there an opportunity to attack them leaving Syria going into Iraq?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, I testified about a year ago some things that we were doing at that time, but all I can say, as soon as Mosul fell, I was in Iraq. I was on a video conference with President Obama, and we acted immediately, which my testimony laid out, to set the conditions for what we are doing now. And we—the President made decisions within the earliest hours of Mosul falling to get Special Forces into the field to see what was happening, to get our intelligence overhead, to set up joint operation centers. And that helped set the conditions for being able to fight back and, most importantly for working with the Iraqis, to get a new Iraqi Government up. The new Iraqi Government is the strategic foundation we have that we did not have back in June or we didn't have, really, for the past year.

Mr. MARINO. I am not going to second guess you and sit here and question the decisions on getting the information that we needed before you could go in and do what you decided to do. I mean, I would—just would not do that, but should we increase air strikes, and can we increase air strikes? I do take particular notice and agree with you on your urban combat situation. So could we increase air strikes and, you know, pound ISIS even more?

Ambassador MCGURK. I think, and going to the point of how careful we are being, there is—I think you will see air strikes increase as Iraqi offensive operations increase, because when there are ongoing operations, we are able to strike targets in support of those operations and our limitations are not as narrow as when we strike targets simply by our intelligence picture. So when Iraqis are moving in the field and then when ISIL begins to show itself, our air strikes increase. So you might see an increase in the numbers, but, again, the numbers I just gave are pretty significant.

I just got a report when I was coming here in the car. We have done—over the past couple days, we have struck targets just in Iraq, in Mosul, Ramadi, Al-Qa'im, Kirkuk, Baiji, Samarra. So, you know, we are—to say we are extremely serious about this, we are offensive minded, and we are taking the fight to ISIL every single hour.

Mr. MARINO. Would we be in a better position, and I am playing Monday morning quarterback here, but would we have been in a better position to leave troops in Iraq instead of pulling them out?

Ambassador MCGURK. I will let the historians sort that out. There is a lot that went into those decisions, but I am really focused on where we are right now.

Mr. MARINO. Well, you pretty much answered the question for me, and I know you have a fine line to walk, but there is no doubt in my mind we left there way too soon. It was the President's agenda, and now he realizes that we are up against—our backs are up against the wall here.

So, with that, I yield back my time.

Ambassador MCGURK. Let me say if I could just answer—



Mr. MARINO. Yeah. Please, go ahead.

Ambassador MCGURK [continuing]. Real quick because it is significant to point out that we left in 2011 under an agreement in 2008, and one issue, from the moment we invaded Iraq, is that we invaded Iraq. We weren't invited into Iraq. What is significant about right now, and this was really apparent to me when I was in Iraq last month, that the Iraqis have now invited us in to help them. It is a totally different environment than our presence in the past, and it gives us kind of a new foundation in which to operate in Iraq is significant. Right up until the end of our presence in Iraq, it was always extremely controversial that we were there at all. But right now—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Ambassador, at this point, I, unfortunately, have to cut you off because I will recognize the remaining members to 4 minutes each because I know that you need to leave by 12:15.

Mr. Cicilline of Rhode Island.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Ambassador for being here today to discuss the implementation as it relates to our strategy to defeat ISIS and to also have the opportunity to say thank you for your extraordinary service to our country in an area of tremendous difficulty. Like you, I believe there is no military solution to the conflict in Iraq and Syria. And I have continued to have very deep reservations about the efficacy of the military actions that we have taken, particularly as it relates to the equip and train vetted Syrian rebels. And my concern, of course, is that this will lead to a deepening of our involvement in a sectarian civil war. And I know many of the questions I have would be better answered by DoD, but to the extent that you can comment on these things, it would be tremendously helpful.

And the first question I have is we have—the administration has spoken a lot about the importance of building an international coalition to fight ISIL on a global scale.

Could you just share some more details about the progress that we have made in building that coalition, what the barriers have been to sustaining the coalition? Particularly, as it relates to the train and equip programs, what kind of response have we had from some of the more wary countries, and, finally, how are the countries working together to share the burden of responding to this global threat? And I note, in your written testimony, that only the United Kingdom, Belgium, The Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and Denmark are involved in the air strikes, so that there are no regional partners. And that, of course, raises a concern about kind of this notion of outside the region engaging in this military conflict.

So would you talk a little bit about where we are in building a meaningful coalition, not just a kind of photo op, but people are really committed to this effort and how they are sharing the burdens of this fight against ISIS.

Ambassador MCGURK. Thank you, Congressman.

And, look, we built this coalition from scratch; 90 days ago this didn't exist at all. The conversations began in September at the NATO summit in Wales with the President and Secretary Kerry.

Immediately after that, in Jeddah, we brought the GCC together and some other key partners. We had a meeting in Jeddah which issued a very strong communique. We then met in a broader group in Paris. And then in the U.N. General Assembly meetings here in New York, later that month in September, we began to build this coalition.

In Jeddah, the focus with some of the GCC partners was in joining an air campaign in Syria, and once those air strikes started, you saw the regional states, Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar was also a part of those operations, join in that campaign.

Since then, we have moved to really develop these 5 lines of effort with bringing countries from all around the world, and that is why 60 members joined in Brussels, for a cooperative effort along military, counter-finance, counter-foreign fighters, humanitarian, and delegitimization. There is a different role for every country to play. So with the military side, we have the air campaign. We also have now substantial contributions developing to support the train/equip effort in Iraq. We have Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia supporting the train/equip effort for Syria.

But really, most importantly also, on the other lines of effort on foreign fighters, President Obama chaired a pretty extraordinary Security Council session in September at the U.N. General Assembly, and Security Council passed a Chapter VII resolution on foreign fighters that had the most sponsors of any resolution in history, I was told. Over 100 sponsors, and we are now working—we go to capital after capital. I was just in Brussels addressing the EU Parliament, in fact, about implementing that resolution, and we are having some real progress.

We are seeing countries pass legislation to cut down on foreign fighters. We are seeing foreign fighter cells broken up. And this wasn't happening 90 days ago.

On counter-finance, the same thing. We have had—Kuwait has passed new legislation. Working closely with the Kuwaitis to shut down some problematic channels that we had been seeing, and working with other partners in the Gulf. So I could go on, but the coalition, I think, is actually extremely meaningful, and considering that we built it from scratch 90 days ago, and at these key events—and I saw President Obama and I saw Secretary Kerry work this directly with the world leaders to pull this together. It is really extraordinary, and then with the appointment of General Allen, it has just boosted our efforts around the world. So we are going to—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chair. If I might just ask the witness to provide us maybe in a written response the status of those foreign fighter—the adoption of that resolution in each of the respective countries. Our last witness that appeared before us also referenced—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection.

Mr. CICILLINE [continuing]. And I think we would benefit from a real understanding of—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Duncan of South Carolina is recognized.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And, Ambassador, thanks for being here.

I appreciate some of the comments made by Mr. Connolly from Virginia about the situation in Iraq and the collapse of the Iraqi army in the face of ISIS, and I just wanted to comment, maybe provide an answer for him, because I think it is the elephant in the room that nobody really wants to talk about, and that is fact that we prematurely left Iraq after the President had made a campaign promise to be out of Iraq by the end of his first term. And we failed to leave a contingency force there, even after Prime Minister Maliki offered immunity to U.S. troops there via Executive order because the President wanted to see the Iraqi Parliament cast a vote on that, which they did, and it failed, and so we don't have a contingency force that we need in 2014 and 2013, in Iraq, that could have faced off against ISIS.

And so, Ambassador, I am sitting here listening to this, and the President really fails to articulate what success in Iraq or a success against ISIS or ISIL looks like. So I am asking you, in a little bit of my time, to define success. What does success look like to you against ISIS?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, it is a three-phase campaign, Congressman, to degrade, dismantle, and defeat, and what we are really looking at, number one, in the first phase is helping the Iraqis control their sovereign space. Right now, they do not control a third of their country. So helping the Iraqis control their sovereign space is a critical test of how we are going to be doing.

Degrading ISIL in Syria, because ISIL is controlling a huge swath or territory in Syria, is number two, and leading ultimately to a political transition in Syria, which is going to be extremely difficult.

But in the first phase of this campaign, it is helping the Iraqis regain control of its sovereign territory.

Mr. DUNCAN. Okay. Let's shift gears here, because I think—I think success against ISIS is reclaiming all the land in Iraq that we lost so much American blood and American treasure liberating. I saw it as a liberating action, and then we can talk about the Syrian civil war and who may or may not be friendly there that we want to back, and I don't think that has been determined yet, but I do know who is friendly, and that is the Kurds. They have been there since 1990 when we first went in the Gulf War. They have been there with America against the Iraqi Government in the liberation effort. So, in Iraq, when faced with ISIL, the Iraqi soldiers cut and run in Mosul, but who didn't cut and run was the Kurdish fighters. Who didn't cut and run in the face of a bulldozer that was armored in Erbil, they didn't cut and run; they actually ran toward the bulldozer to try to attack it and stop it, and 25 or so Kurdish fighters lost their lives because they didn't have the necessary armament and ability to stop something like that and to stop some of the other weapons that ISIL now has and using in theater.

So my question to you is this: Does the administration intend to more robustly equip the Kurdish forces to commence the offensive operations? What kind of weapons other than pistols, rifles, small arms; what else are we going to give our friends the Kurds to fight ISIL?

Ambassador MCGURK. I think, Congressman, I have discussed this earlier, but, I mean, we are going to be giving them a lot, and also through cooperation of the Iraqi Government, about, you know—

Mr. DUNCAN. If I asked them, would they say that?

Ambassador MCGURK [continuing]. The 25 MRAPs they are going to be getting, and we are going to train/equip three Peshmerga brigades with the same Western equipment that any Iraqi brigade would have.

Mr. DUNCAN. MRAP is more a defensive posturing. What kind of offensive weapons do we anticipate them having?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, there is a huge list of what we are giving them, from RPGs to anti-tank rounds to everything else, and that list has been worked up with the Iraqis and the Kurds. And we—again, about 40 cargo flights have now come into Erbil to off-load this equipment, and I agree with you that the Peshmerga have been very heroic fighters, and also—and I think the Kurds would be the first to admit this—Iraqi fighters south of the Kurdistan region have been extraordinarily heroic if you look at the defense of the Baiji refinery. That went on for 6 months.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

Mr. Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, and, again, Mr. Ambassador, thank you for being here and for your service to our country.

Let me lay out four questions you can answer here, but I would appreciate a more elaborate written explanation.

But in your opening remarks, you indicated that it was going to take a long time to defeat ISIL. What, in your sense, is the frame, broadly defined, what is that long time?

You indicated that there are different challenges in fighting ISIL in Iraq and in Syria. Can ISIL be defeated in one country and not be defeated in the other? Is this a either/or, or do we have to do both?

Can ISIL be defeated in Syria without first or at least nearly simultaneous achievement of a political settlement in Syria? And then maybe this is a paradox; can we achieve a political settlement in Syria without pushing back or defeating ISIL?

My fourth question is, what are the biggest threats to our continued progress being made against ISIL in the next 30 to 90 days, in the next year, and then long term?

And, finally, what can and should Congress be doing to help you in your mission to push back, contain, and ultimately defeat ISIL?

And, with that, I will leave you the remainder of the time.

Ambassador MCGURK. Those are big questions, and I thank you for your offer that I can follow up with some of those in writing in the interest of time. I think I would be happy to do that.

In terms of time frame, we say “years” for a reason. I don’t want to put a specific time frame on this. I think that that would be artificial, and this is going to be a multiyear challenge, so that is really the only way that I can really answer that. It is going to be a multiyear challenge.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. But if I can, in the context of looking at the 12 months from March 2015 until 2016, that is going to be the front

end of the battle against ISIL that will last, in your opinion, longer than that?

Ambassador MCGURK. We would like to see the Iraqis over the next 12 to 18 months begin to restore control over their sovereign territory and begin to restore control of the Iraq/Syria border. I mean, that process will begin over the next year, and we are working with the Iraqis on a plan for that.

In terms of the Congress, of course, the funding authority that we need, which I know that you are working on and we hope to have done shortly, and we really want to thank you for that, will be critical. The DoD request for the train/equip programs in Iraq and Syria will immediately be put to good use because we have programs ready to go now just waiting for that authorization, so we can thank you very much for all that this committee has done to support those efforts.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. To the middle questions, can we defeat ISIL in Iraq or push them back in Iraq, give Iraq autonomy again and not defeat them at the same time in Syria to be effective?

Ambassador MCGURK. No. We made a determination that to degrade ISIL's warfighting capacity, we would have to target them in Syria as well.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. So you have to do both. And in Syria, is it possible to push back against ISIL without simultaneously having a political solution and, as you said, a political solution that cannot and does not include Assad?

Ambassador MCGURK. I think these things do go hand in hand, but in order to get a political solution, you have to have a counterweight to extremist groups like ISIL, and that is what we are doing with the train and equip effort and some other efforts.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. All right.

With that, I will yield back my time.

Mr. DUNCAN [presiding]. Thank the gentleman. The Chair will recognize Mr. Kinzinger from Illinois.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Sir, thank you for being here. I do not envy the position that you have to sit in right now because I am sure truthfully you probably have a lot of disagreements with what is happening, but I respect and understand your position, and I appreciate your service. So don't take any of this personally, please.

You mentioned 25 MRAPs being given to the Peshmerga. Great start. I think we are giving 250 to the Iraqi Government. That is one MRAP per 26 miles along a 650-mile border that the Kurds have with ISIS. So I would like to point out, you know, 25 MRAPs is really a joke. I mean, honestly, and I know it is not your decision, but I think—you know, when I was in Iraq recently, I went on a trip, and I left in 2009, and we had the war won, and when I went back in 2014 to see what had transpired since I left Iraq, was—I mean, personally, it was devastating, and it was hard for me to even talk about, but, you know, when I talked to our folks there that say, well, we just have to teach the Kurds how to concentrate forces of fire and not—you know, like as if three machine guns would somehow take out an MRAP better. It was crazy.

Also, it is kind of fun on the committee to see all these kind of new hawks that I remember talking 2 years ago about we are going

to have to go back to Iraq, and people thought it was a joke and thought I was joking, and here we are.

Let me just, on the Syrian side of things, I think our failure to enforce the red line has been one of the most devastating foreign policy decisions for a couple reasons. I remember up to the red line discussion, there was legitimate talk about getting Bashar al-Assad out of office. You know, give him money and send him somewhere with sanctuary, whatever, but we got to preserve the institutions of the state. And I think had a new leader and probably have actually solved this peacefully.

Today there is no real discussion about Bashar al-Assad leaving peacefully because he has no incentive to, and that is why I am a supporter of enforcing a no-fly zone—of even strikes against the Assad regime, because it changes the calculus in his mind to have him now understand that maybe if his life is at threat, he is going to peacefully leave Syria with the institutions in place and help peaceful transitions. That is how you are going to defeat ISIS, because I, frankly, think that Bashar al-Assad is the incubator of ISIS. He is the reason they are there. You kill 200,000 of your people, at some point even a terrible group like ISIS looks better than the guy that killed your wife and your son, as he has done in so many cases.

You mention—by the way, I have heard recent reports even that the FSA is complaining of us cutting funding off to them and not even able to pay their soldiers anymore. I hope that is not true. That would be devastating. As a military guy myself, I expect a paycheck. It doesn't mean I am any less of a patriot; it just means I have to support people when I was full-time active duty.

The one thing I do want to ask you, though, when we talk about, you know, for instance, strikes in Syria, you mentioned loiter time over Syria as having to come from the Gulf. Has there been any negotiations with the Turks in place to try to open up those bases? If so, what has been the administration's response, because from what I understand, they agree to it if there is maybe an air exclusion zone which the administration, I think, is not going to accept because they don't want to tick off Iran in the extra 7 months we have given them for negotiations. In fact, I have heard that, but I would like you to address that, sir, and, again, thank you for being here.

Ambassador MCGURK. Congressman, again, thank you for your service.

And I think everyone who still continues to work on this issue does it in the memory of everyone who has served and particularly lost their lives in Iraq. I mean, that is really something—

Mr. KINZINGER. And I appreciate that.

Ambassador MCGURK [continuing]. Central in all of our minds and why we need to get this right.

The future of Syria, we are very clear. We want a Syria without ISIL or Bashar al-Assad and I discussed some of the ways you want to go about that, but that is going to take a long time.

I guess we are in conversations with Turkey about opening up some of their platforms and also about narrowing some of the areas of disagreement we have had with them. I think we have made some progress, but it is an ongoing process.

Mr. KINZINGER. Let me just say, as I wrap up my time, I don't see any down side in a no-fly or even an exclusionary zone above the FSA. If they are our allies as we are giving lip service to, Bashar al-Assad would be an idiot to challenge America's air superiority, and he probably wouldn't, but, again, thank you for being here, and I yield back.

Mr. DUNCAN. The gentleman's time is expired.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Kennedy from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, thank you for your extraordinary service to our country. Thank you for coming back yet again. I think your testimony is always enlightening and thank you for the extraordinary amount of time, effort, energy that you have put into these issues.

I wanted to ask you two basic areas, and I apologize if I ask you to repeat yourself, so gloss over quickly if I do.

First off, with building a little bit off of what Mr. Kinzinger was just touching on, you mentioned in your opening statement the fact that we have allies in this effort that are on both sides of the Assad debate. Stay or go, if you will.

Much of the testimony that we have heard before this committee is that the main draw for fighters into the region to begin with was against Assad, and you have stated that overall the end game in this, if you will, is the political transition of power or Assad would leave.

I have hard time seeing how at this point there is any impetus to have Assad go, just as Mr. Kinzinger pointed out. I understand that you then said that this was a first phase of this effort, and that it is a years—potentially years long.

What changes this calculus and how long, best estimate, sir, do you think it takes for an armed or moderate Syrian rebel force to actually be strong enough to fend off on one side ISIS and the other side Assad?

Ambassador MCGURK. You hit on a key question, Congressman. I think if you look at the efforts of Staffan de Mistura, that is why he is focused on this bottom up approach, or at least freeze the conflict particularly in Aleppo, and he has discussed that with us. He has discussed it with Bashar al-Assad, and, again, we are fully supportive of those efforts, but we are also concerned because we don't want to have another situation like in Homs or Yarmouk, where you had a ceasefire, which basically was a kneel—grew out of a kneel or starve campaign, which the Assad regime perpetuates upon its population. But when he looked at the situation and said the best we can do right now politically is let's try to freeze the conflict in some of these local areas, particularly Aleppo, and, again, if he can make progress in that, we are fully supportive of that effort.

And then on the trying to get another political process going, that is the efforts that Secretary Kerry of moving forward with some of the key stakeholders in the region, and that is an ongoing process.

But in terms of the force being able to defend against all these multi threats, it is just extremely difficult. And what we are finding is that, you know, there is, you know, tens of thousands of moderate opposition fighters, and my colleague in the State Depart-

ment, Daniel Rubenstein, who has discussed—talking to them every single day, they are very locally rooted, protecting their homes, protecting their neighborhoods, and we do want to make sure that they can protect their homes and neighbors and communities against all of these different threats, and that is why I said in my testimony, particularly for the units we are going to try to train and equip, they will be—they will be organized to fight ISIS, but they are also going to be able to defend themselves against the regime.

Mr. KENNEDY. And, Mr. Ambassador, then if this is essentially the United States, and understanding the blurred lines between Iraq and Syria, but continuing this fight now in another Middle Eastern country for potentially years, I have a very hard time understanding how that there is not additional or a new authorization for the use of military force that is going to be necessary in terms of outlining what these efforts are going to be. I know Secretary Kerry was pushed on this a bit in the Senate yesterday. As I understand, the new Congress is going to start to outline this, and I think some negotiations have already started. Anything that you would suggest we keep in mind as we debate that authorization which, candidly, from my perspective, is now months overdue?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, I think I would just review the Secretary's testimony yesterday. I mean, he did say we are prepared to work with the Congress very closely. We think an AUMF should include—we don't think it should include a geographic limitation. That has been in some of the language. We also want to make sure that the flexibility of the commander in chief, given that we face a very uncertain environment is maintained, but, anyway, we are willing to work with you as the Secretary confirmed yesterday before the Senate.

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you. Sorry to ask.

Mr. DUNCAN. The gentleman's is expired.

The Ambassador does have a meeting at the White House and has a hard departure time at 12:15. So any members that are willing to take less time and yield back the balance would be appreciated.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Yoho from Florida.

Mr. YOH0. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. McGurk, thank you for being here.

ISIS' vision is an apocalyptic vision to destroy America. They want a worldwide caliphate, and in doing that, you know, they are looking to come here. And I know our goal was to defeat ISIS, and, Congressman Duncan asked you the mission, and you defined the mission. In order to complete a battle and have support behind you, you have to have a clear, defined mission. And you kind of laid that out in a three-phase scenario there, in the metrics—you talked about some of the metrics in there.

One of the questions that I have is the coalition that we have, and I know we are training, and in March 2016, you are looking at having 5,000 fighters over there.

How is the global coalition going? Who is on the ground right now? Is it the Syrian Free Rebels? Other countries? What other countries have people in there? Any of the Saudi Arabian countries? Any other countries? Germany? France?



Ambassador MCGURK. Well, we are talking—I would leave it to capitals to announce their commitment, as we are talking with a number of partners to support the train/equip—of course the train/equip mission in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar have been clear that they will host training sites.

Mr. YOHO. But as far as boots on the ground.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, in Iraq, we are going to have a number of coalition partners subject to the approval of the Iraqi Government—

Mr. YOHO. What about right now?

Ambassador MCGURK [continuing]. With the training. Well, Canada, the U.K., Australia.

Mr. YOHO. Are they trainers or are they actual—

Ambassador MCGURK. Trainers.

Mr. YOHO [continuing]. Are they engaged?

Ambassador MCGURK. Trainers and some advise-and-assist units, but focused—we are not going to have units going out. Again, it is subject to whatever the other capitals agree to and subject to the authorization of the Iraqi Government, but we have a number of coalition partners, about 1,500 total, helping us with the train—

Mr. YOHO. But as far as boots on the ground, it is Iraqis, Syrian freedom fighters, the Kurds.

Ambassador MCGURK. Our ground force against ISIL are local forces. That is the model.

Mr. YOHO. In the Middle East, it is in a state of flux, and you said that we have to protect American interests.

What are those? Are they defined in the State Department? What are those interests?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, primarily, we want to protect the homeland against extremist threats and al-Qaeda-borne extremist groups so when you see an organization with 16,000 foreign fighters from 90 different countries around the world flowing into Syria, flowing into Iraq, getting combat experience, and then flowing outwards to their home capitals, potentially here at home, that is a very significant threat.

Mr. YOHO. And you feel it is best to fight them over there then here, and I agree, but the mission, the war on ISIL, is there a way to narrow that down, because that is kind of like the war on poverty or the war on terror. It is this big broad war that never goes away. The war on poverty, we have been fighting it for 50 years, and we are losing ground on it.

Is there a way to streamline these, because we have the war on terror, we have OCO, the Overseas Contingency Operation. Is there a way to streamline these to maximize them so we are concentrating our resources in a specific area, and is there an end game, a defeat of ISIL? Is that something that is—in your mind is plausible, because you are fighting an ideology. How do you bring that to an end, and what is that conclusion?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, it is a good question. That is why we are focused on ISIL as an organization, and we want to we want attrite its manpower, we want to cut off its finances, we want to stop its foreign fighters and basically suffocate the entire organization, and that is what we are focused on doing.

Mr. YOHO. Do you see—we tried that with the Taliban and al-Qaeda and we got to a point where we thought we had them defeated, but here they are again, and ISIL came out of that, and do you see if we don't—if we don't have a definition of completeness, there is going to be an ISIL part 2, and I see these forces coming together because their mission is to bring the caliphate over here, and you don't have time to answer that, but if you could jot something down and enter it into the record, I would appreciate it, and you have a great—

Mr. DESANTIS [presiding]. Gentleman's time is expired.

Chair now recognizes the gentlemen from California, 4 minutes.

And members are reminded if they can yield back time, we will get everyone in, the Ambassador has got to leave in about 20 minutes.

Mr. BERA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Obviously, this is complicated, to say the least.

Mr. Ambassador, you laid out the 3 planks: Degrade ISIL, dismantle ISIL, and defeat ISIL. It does look like we are in the phase of degrading ISIL.

You also laid out two prongs to that degradation. The counterfinance operation to choke off ISIL's funding, and then also breaking up and reducing the foreign fighters.

Can you give us an update on how the counter-finance operation is doing drawing down ISIL's sources of revenue and how that is impacting morale?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, I can give you anecdotes, and I can come back in a different setting and give you some figures, but we have taken off line about 22 mobile refineries. They had a refining capacity of roughly 240 barrels a day almost, which was a substantial revenue stream. We have taken most of that offline, and I can come give you the specific figures, and we have seen increasing reports, particularly in Ninawa and Mosul that their ability to pay their fighters is substantially degraded, and also that their ability to get fuel is also degraded, but we got to keep at this.

Mr. BERA. Do we get a sense that those fighters that are on the ground with ISIL right now, are they losing some of those fighters, or are we—

Ambassador MCGURK. They are losing fighters at a pretty substantial clip every week based upon our air strikes, and that is why, again, Kobani has been significant, because they flooded hundreds of fighters into Kobani, including, we had indications, some of their top fighters, and we were able to deal with them quite effectively.

Mr. BERA. And then, as the second part of the degradation mission, breaking up and reducing the inflow of foreign fighters, you referenced working with our alliance partners and so forth, a broad coalition of folks that are stepping up to reduce the influx of foreign fighters.

Can you give us an update on what we may be seeing in those—

Ambassador MCGURK. It is difficult to measure, but ISIL's—its propaganda is that it is a war of flags. It is planting its flag everywhere it goes. You can see that in its media products, and what we have been able to do over the last 90 days is completely reverse

that notion. It is now contracting, and I think the—it was selling this message that if you come and join ISIS and come to Syria, you will basically live this utopian fantasy. I think that fantasy is now clearly not true. You go to Syria, you are probably going to get killed, and if you go home, you are probably going to get arrested and prosecuted.

I was in Germany last week when they sentenced their first—an ISIL fighter who returned to Germany was sentenced to 3 years in prison. So I think, you know, the tide is turning, but we need to—again, we just need to keep at this.

Mr. BERA. And are we seeing our—the Muslim countries in the region that are coalition partners stepping up kind of the anti-propaganda, anti-messaging—

Ambassador MCGURK. Yes. They are extremely focused on that, and in the interest of time, I would actually—I could provide you a fairly detailed written account to respond to that.

Mr. BERA. That would be great. I will go ahead and yield my time back.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank the gentleman for that.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Weber, for 4 minutes.

Mr. WEBER. Earlier you said, Ambassador McGurk, that we don't want to tie the hands of the commander in chief, but if he doesn't listen to his military generals and then the Congress and our wishes—i.e., Ed Royce's and Mr. Engel's legislation that they filed to allow us to sell weapons to the Kurds—is he tying our hands, tying the military's hands?

Ambassador MCGURK. Again, I am regularly in meetings with the President and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and it is a very free-flowing conversation. I have seen no indication that any hands are being tied.

Mr. WEBER. Why do you suppose he has—I think—and I don't want to put words in Chairman Royce's mouth, but, you know, he said he filed that legislation. I guess it comes out that the admin is opposed to it. Why do you think that is?

Ambassador MCGURK. I am not going to comment on pending legislation, but I am happy to work with the committee on legislation to advance these ideas. The draft I have seen—one of the preambular paragraphs talks about the need for Baghdad to begin to resolve these issues expeditiously, and I think we are now seeing that happening. So—

Mr. WEBER. Okay. Let me move on from there: 50,000 ghost soldiers were on the payroll, and we discover that, and hopefully we are not sending that money anymore.

Do we know who is responsible for that, and are they still in a position of authority?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, I think, you know, 36 commanders have been terminated and new commanders have been appointed. So—

Mr. WEBER. So we are confident that we rooted that out?

Ambassador MCGURK. No. I don't think we are confident it has entirely been rooted out. This is going to be a—

Mr. WEBER. Confident that we rooted out that corruption of those 50,000 ghost soldiers.

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, that was, and I defer to the Iraqi Government who made the statements about this, but that they found situations in which soldiers no longer were active and were still getting paychecks, meaning those paychecks were going to someone else, and that—

Mr. WEBER. Okay. Let me move on really quick so try to yield some time.

You said 22 mobile refineries, 240 barrels a day. At \$80 a barrel, that is \$576,000 a month. At \$60 a barrel, it is \$432,000 a month.

How are they able to hang on to that money and disburse it? Are we tracking that? Are we able to get into financial institutions? How is that working?

Ambassador MCGURK. Yeah. That is why we have a—that is why we have a line of effort focused on the counterfinance, and that is led by our colleagues—some of my colleagues at the State Department, also at the Treasury Department. We are taking all the tools in our sanctions tool kit, which are very effective and bringing it to bear on this problem. In terms—

Mr. WEBER. Very quickly, so I can yield some time here, who do we think is getting the most of that money? The banks, for example, or who is buying that oil, I guess I should say. Is it Turkey—

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, a lot of it is smuggled. It is through the Kurdistan region and through Turkey, but I—we haven't seen any complicity by Kurdish authorities or Turkish—

Mr. WEBER. Let me yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DESANTIS. I thank the gentleman.

The Chair now recognizes Ms. Frankel from Florida, 4 minutes.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, sir, for your testimony here today.

And, you know, I have heard a lot of frustration, some loud voices, from Congress, but I just have not heard any real good ideas or plans put forth by the Congress.

And I think maybe that is the reason we have not done what I think we should have done, which is to take up and debate this so-called war against ISIL. And we have really ducked our responsibility, which is to either authorize or not this war.

With that said, I want to ask you a couple of questions just at the end of the line here.

Are we giving supplies and money directly to the Peshmerga or does it go through Iraq Government? That is question number 1.

Ambassador MCGURK. Sure.

Ms. FRANKEL. Number 2 is: Can I—can we assume from your testimony that there is no ongoing conversations for any kind of political settlement in Syria? And what would be your idea as to who would—what the Government would look like, from a practical point of view, if al-Assad was not present? And if you have any more time, I would like to understand the general conditions in Syria in terms of who is providing services to what segments of the population.

Ambassador MCGURK. First, in terms of supplying the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, it goes through—it is a cooperative collaborative process now with the Kurds, with us, with the central government, and it seems to be—I think it is working very well. If there are ad-

ditional requests from Kurdish authorities, we sit down with them and will work through them, and we will continue to do that.

Ms. FRANKEL. But you have to get permission from the Iraq Government. Is that correct?

Ambassador MCGURK. Permission. It is a collaborative process, and the new—as I mentioned, the Minister of Defense has approved every single request that has come. It is just a new—we are in a bit of a new era here, and we need to keep it moving the right way.

In terms of the situation with what the future Assad regime might look like, we are working on starting a political transition process based on the principles of the Geneva Communique from a couple years ago, which lays out a very clear transition process that the world had really united around.

And Secretary Kerry, as I have mentioned, has been involved with the key stakeholders to try to get that process on track. And then the process with Staffan de Mistura is also ongoing, which I discussed.

Ms. FRANKEL. Is anyone from Syria involved in the process right now?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, again, my colleague, Daniel Rubenstein, is in touch with Syrians every single day. I mean, not only is my office almost right next to his, I see him on airplanes in the region because we are criss-crossing the region. So he is constantly in discussion with particularly the Syrian opposition.

Ms. FRANKEL. And then what about Mr. Assad?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, again, I think there is a consensus that the future of Syria with him at the helm will not be stable and will continue to fuel his extremism. So the process by which we have a transition, however, remains the long pull and intent.

Ms. FRANKEL. I yield the rest of my time.

Mr. DESANTIS. I thank the gentlewoman.

The Chair now recognizes himself for 4 minutes.

Ambassador, in terms of Iran, do you believe that they can in any way be a constructive force in the fight against ISIS?

Because there has been some talk that maybe, you know, they have sectarian differences with them and maybe that is good for us.

What is your position? And how are you conducting yourself in performing your duties with that in mind?

Ambassador MCGURK. Again, we have no coordination with the Iranians whatsoever. We recognize that ISIL is a threat to Iran and, given the proximity and the border between Iraq and Iran, that, you know, Iran has a stake in this. But how they conduct themselves, whether it is in full respect with Iraqi sovereignty or not, remains an open question.

And we have discussed this with multiple Iraqi leaders, and they are very protective of their sovereignty against any other foreign state, whether it is us or Iran. And Grand Ayatollah Sistani has also spoken to this, about the danger of unregulated militias operating on Iraqi soil. So it remains an ongoing thing.

I just go back to my opening statement that the state structures of Iraq almost entirely collapsed 6 months ago today. We are rebuilding from there. It is going to be a very long process. And Iran

inevitably will have a role in this. It is just an open question of whether they want to play a role that is constructive or destructive.

Mr. DESANTIS. I will just say I am very—and I think a lot of my colleagues here on the committee are very skeptical that Iran could play a constructive role. I know the President wrote a letter to the Ayatollah several weeks ago, was reported, and I think a lot of us are concerned about where that may go. Iran does want to be involved in Iraq, but I think it is to sow more mischief.

Let me ask you this about the train-and-equip mission in terms of the rebels in Syria. Now, we passed the McKeon—Congress passed the McKeon amendment, talked about what appropriately vetted rebels, how they could qualify to be vetted. And, basically, it was saying, you know, no terrorist ties or anything.

Congress just passed last week—that was—the NDAA compromise. That was the 1,600-page bill we got put on us last week. Now this week is the Cromnibus. But we did have a 1,600-page NDAA last week.

And I was reading through that and I noticed that the section about the train-and-equip for the Syria rebels—part A is substantially the same as the McKeon, and part B, though, is new.

And it said not only do they not have to have terrorist ties—it says and, B, they have to show a commitment for such elements, groups, and individuals to promoting the respect for human rights and the rule of law.

So are you aware that that provision was in the NDAA?

Ambassador MCGURK. Again, I think our vetting standards are fairly consistent with similar efforts in the past.

Mr. DESANTIS. Because I think there is a difference between just not being a terrorist—I mean, you could still have a desire for an Islamic state, a Sharia state. You could still be a sectarian fighter.

I mean, rule of law and human rights, that means there are more pro-American fighters. And it didn't seem to me that the groups that I saw on the ground and in the reports would really qualify as really great groups. It was kind of like the lesser of two evils.

So is this going to change the vetting, this language, or you didn't think it will?

Ambassador MCGURK. I think, you know, General Mike Nagada, who is doing this full-time—and we are working to generate classes to fill these training sites as early as March—has focused on the vetting. So I defer the question to DoD.

Mr. DESANTIS. I think it is a concern because, I mean, we are training these guys in Saudi. You know, Qatar is involved. And those are not exactly states where there is a lot of respect for human rights.

But I am going to yield—

Ambassador MCGURK. We have control on them. We maintain control in the vetting, which is the critical criterion.

Mr. DESANTIS. No. I understand that.

So I will yield back the balance of my time.

And I will now recognize Mr. Deutch for 4 minutes.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador McGurk, thanks for being here. Thanks for your continued good service.

I want to just follow up on the chairman's questions about Iran. You had said that Iran would play a role. We are concerned—there is some concern, obviously, about the role they are already playing.

There were reports this week that said that Kurds force leaders are on the ground in Iraq. There were—there obviously have been reports about Iranian air strikes.

One thing I am not sure that you have had a chance to do yet: Can you confirm the U.S. is still not cooperating with Iran militarily at all?

Ambassador MCGURK. Yes. Absolutely. I can confirm that.

Mr. DEUTCH. And then I want—I would like to just circle back—given the Iranian involvement in Iraq, I would like to circle back to Syria, where I think it is related.

Because with respect to the Syrian opposition and the role that—the role our efforts to strengthen them plays in countering ISIS, there has been a lot written lately about the moderate opposition feeling squeezed, and we have heard from some groups here that U.S. air strikes are seen as helping Assad in the fight inside Syria.

So if you—if you accept that premise and you add to it the fact that Iran is on the ground in Syria, that the opposition used the Iranians as the most important player in propping up the Assad regime, which has slaughtered over 200,000 people—if you play all of that in, how does the effect of both our ISIS operations on Syria and the comments that we have made—while we are not cooperating with Iran, some positive comments about Iranian air strikes being beneficial in going after ISIS—how does all that play in the ability of the moderates in Syria to ever be able to cast off Assad?

Ambassador MCGURK. I would—again, it is a—as one of your colleagues mentioned, it is an extremely complicated situation, and we are looking very closely and are concerned about any effort of the Assad regime to exploit the fact that, you know, we are striking ISIL, which is a necessary—degrading ISIL is a necessary condition to any future in Syria, which would be—which would be stable and prosperous for the Syrian people.

So we are looking at this extremely closely, Congressman. It is extremely complicated. But right now our focus in Syria, given that we are at the earliest phase of Phase 1 in this campaign, is to degrade ISIL.

At the same time, we have, in the medium term, the train-and-equip effort in getting these units employed into the field, which will be a kind of an inkblot strategy as they begin to stabilize local areas and begin to provide a counterweight to extremists. And those units will have to be able to defend themselves against the regime. There is no question about that.

Mr. DEUTCH. And if the—here's the fundamental question. For the opposition in Syria that has—that has looked—that has looked to us and others and has said, "It is now years that war has been waged against us. There are over 200,000 dead. There hasn't been any real—aside from the political efforts, there hasn't really been any effort to take action to save the lives of—or prevent the barrel bombs from being dropped or to provide cover for humanitarian aid," if that is their—that is the way they view it, what do we—what is the response to them when they now come back and say, "And now you are involved in training some people to go after ISIS,

but that still leaves open the possibility that Assad can continue to slaughter us with impunity”?

Ambassador MCGURK. Well, again, Congressman, I mean, there have been efforts. There are some efforts that I don’t—I obviously can’t discuss here.

So there is a lot going on here with the moderate opposition groups that we support in a various—myriad of ways. So—but we have conversations with them constantly.

But if you just look at a map of Syria, about the swath of territory through the entire Euphrates Valley that ISIL controls, having a coherent plan and working with local forces and working with the moderate opposition to degrade ISIL in those areas and begin to recover those populations from the boot of ISIL, that is a significant interest.

That is in our interest and, also, in the interest of the Syrian people and the moderate opposition. So we are trying to find that intersection with them to be able to work very cooperatively together.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman’s time’s expired. And the Ambassador has a hard stop.

So we want to really thank you for giving us the time you have. And there is obviously a lot going on in this region. It is complicated. But we are going to continue to monitor it because we know it is important for our security interests. So thanks.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:15 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]



## A P P E N D I X

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**  
**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

**Edward R. Royce (R-CA), Chairman**

December 3, 2014

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

**DATE:** Wednesday, December 10, 2014

**TIME:** 10:00 a.m.

**SUBJECT:** Countering ISIS: Are We Making Progress?

**WITNESS:** The Honorable Brett McGurk  
Deputy Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL  
U.S. Department of State

**By Direction of the Chairman**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 12/10/14 Room 2172

Starting Time 10:05 a.m. Ending Time 12:15 p.m.

Recesses 0 ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to )

**Presiding Member(s)**

*Edward R. Royce, Chairman; Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen; Rep. Jeff Duncan; Rep. Ron DeSantis*

**Check all of the following that apply:**

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

**TITLE OF HEARING:**

*Countering ISIS: Are We Making Progress?*

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*See Attendance Sheet.*

**NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*None.*

**HEARING WITNESSES:** Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

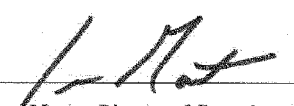
*(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)*

**STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD:** *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

**TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE** \_\_\_\_\_

or

**TIME ADJOURNED** 12:15 p.m.

  
Jean Marter, Director of Committee Operations

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
*FULL COMMITTEE HEARING*

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Edward R. Royce, CA
X	Christopher H. Smith, NJ
X	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, FL
X	Dana Rohrabacher, CA
X	Steve Chabot, OH
X	Joe Wilson, SC
	Michael T. McCaul, TX
X	Ted Poc, TX
X	Matt Salmon, AZ
X	Tom Marino, PA
X	Jeff Duncan, SC
X	Adam Kinzinger, IL
	Mo Brooks, AL
X	Tom Cotton, AR
	Paul Cook, CA
X	George Holding, NC
X	Randy K. Weber, Sr., TX
X	Scott Perry, PA
X	Steve Stockman, TX
X	Ron DeSantis, FL
	Doug Collins, GA
X	Mark Meadows, NC
X	Ted S. Yoho, FL
	Sean Duffy, WI
X	Curt Clawson, FL

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Eliot L. Engel, NY
	Eni F.H. Faleomavaega, AS
X	Brad Sherman, CA
X	Gregory W. Meeks, NY
X	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
X	Brian Higgins, NY
	Karen Bass, CA
X	William Keating, MA
X	David Cicilline, RI
	Alan Grayson, FL
X	Juan Vargas, CA
X	Bradley S. Schneider, IL
X	Joseph P. Kennedy III, MA
X	Ami Bera, CA
X	Alan S. Lowenthal, CA
X	Grace Meng, NY
X	Lois Frankel, FL
X	Tulsi Gabbard, HI
X	Joaquin Castro, TX

### Questions for the Record

*Submitted by the Honorable William R. Keating  
To Ambassador Brett McGurk*

#### **Question 1:**

Can you expand on the U.S. Government's humanitarian assistance efforts in these afflicted countries? And, what efforts are we making –if any – to bolster their security in the face of weakened resources and an increasing threat by ISIS? Has the change in our relationship with Russia impacted aid efforts? What challenges remain in both securing and administering this assistance?

#### **Answer:**

Since the conflict in Syria began in 2011, the United States has provided over \$3 billion in humanitarian assistance to support those affected by the conflict in Syria and the region, with nearly half of U.S. humanitarian aid delivered to those in need inside Syria. Our assistance inside Syria is provided by UN agencies, other international organizations, and non-government organizations (NGOs) impartially and on the basis of need in opposition, regime-held, and contested areas. This assistance includes but is not limited to food, emergency medical supplies, shelter, health care, education materials, and clean water. While the United States remains the global leader in humanitarian assistance to Syria, we remain mindful that the critical needs of Syrians throughout the country will only continue to increase as the conflict persists. We will continue to work with other donor countries, including countries that have not traditionally contributed to humanitarian responses, to ensure this assistance is coordinated and that needs are met through increased humanitarian contributions.

Providing humanitarian assistance in regime-held areas and areas under the control of ISIL is challenging, but not unmountable. The United States co-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2165 in July 2014, authorizing UN agencies and implementing partners to deliver assistance across key Syrian border crossings and over internal conflict lines without the Syrian regime's permission. The UN Security Council recently extended this mandate to January 2016 in UNSCR 2919, again with our co-sponsorship and supported by Russia. UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos recently reported to the Security Council that resolutions 2139 and 2165 had improved humanitarian access and strengthened the UN's coordination with NGOs delivering cross-border aid, and enabled the UN to share data more effectively and reduce assistance duplication. Nonetheless, the situation in besieged areas remains "extremely grave," and the Assad regime continues to obstruct assistance deliveries.

The United States is currently providing \$330 million in non-lethal transition assistance to the Syrian opposition, including vetted units of the moderate armed opposition. This assistance is helping the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC), local opposition government councils, security actors, and civil society groups to respond to the needs of their communities by providing essential services and extending the rule of law. U.S. non-lethal assistance to Syria's moderate armed opposition members helps them protect their communities and sustain their fight against the Syrian regime and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The U.S. bilateral relationship with Russia has not impacted the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The U.S. will continue to provide humanitarian assistance on the basis of need through all available channels.

#### **Question 2:**

*How can the U.S. government strategy in Iraq better support interventions that address the root causes of the sectarian violence – weak governance, political grievances, and poor respect for human rights and the rule of law – that are driving displacement and the rise of extremist groups?*

**Answer:**

President Obama and Secretary Kerry have stressed that the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq cannot be based solely on military efforts, but rather must focus on rooting out the conditions and policies which allowed such extremism to foment. To that end, I wholeheartedly share your sentiment that the U.S. strategy in Iraq must support the Government of Iraq's efforts to address the root causes of the current conflict and ongoing sectarian violence.

Further to this endeavor, President Obama linked U.S. airstrikes and kinetic action to halt ISIL's advancement into Iraq in August on forward movement in Iraq's democratic process, aided by the selection of new Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who has committed, through words and actions, to reform the policies of his predecessor and govern in an inclusive manner. We have made clear to the new Iraqi government that ISIL cannot be defeated by military action alone, that wholesale political reform and inclusive governance are essential to unifying the Iraqi people against the threat of extremism, and to promoting stability in the country. Already, we have seen significant progress – in recent weeks the Prime Minister has taken key steps to address significant Sunni grievances and govern inclusively such as:

- Issuing an executive order enacting additional rights for detainees and upholding rule of law on December 2.
- Issuing an executive order calling for the dropping of all pending lawsuits against journalists, stressing respect for freedom of expression and democracy promotion on December 18.
- Moving forward efforts to arm and compensate nearly 3,000 Sunni tribesmen in Anbar province in efforts to engage all Iraqis in the security forces and the fight against extremism.
- Abolishing the Office of the Commander in Chief, an office of his predecessor which had further centralized power under the Prime Minister.
- Appointing security ministers for the first time in four years, to include a Sunni Minister of Defense from Mosul.
- Initiating draft legislation to establish a new "National Guard," force to devolve more oversight of security forces to provincial governments, a reform long sought by Sunnis and other communities in Iraq.

These examples are just a few illustrations of steps the Government of Iraq has taken to govern more inclusively and effectively, addressing key concerns of Sunnis and minority groups in Iraq. As part of our strategy in the counter-ISIL campaign, we continue to work aggressively to pressure the GOI to enact further reforms to unify Iraqis and promote human rights and the rule of law. Our Ambassador in Baghdad engages regularly with the senior-most officials in the Iraqi government pressing for additional concessions on Sunni political grievances, the clamping down of human rights abuses by unregulated militias, and the further integration of Sunnis into the armed forces.

We know that the process may be slow, but that our steady engagement and commitment to Iraq's sovereignty and democratic processes can result in the reforms needed. We understand that our continued engagement will remain essential in moving forward Iraq's distinct components towards unity in the fight against ISIL and we will continue to prioritize addressing the root causes of Iraq's current sectarian violence in our overall strategy to defeat and degrade ISIL and violent extremism.

**Question 3:**

What efforts is the U.S. government making to understand and respond to the needs of Iraqis trapped in IS-controlled or contested areas? Please outline the Administration's thinking on how to help people in these hard-to-reach areas of central and southern Iraq.

**Answer:**

The U.S. government provided more than \$208 million in humanitarian assistance in Fiscal Year 2014 to provide life-saving assistance for displaced Iraqis in all governorates inside Iraq and throughout the Middle East. This funding has enabled humanitarian partners to begin to map, register, understand the needs of vulnerable Iraqis, and provide food, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene, healthcare, and education assistance. The U.S. government is also encouraging the Government of Iraq to continue paying the salaries of displaced government workers, provide kerosene to the displaced for heating and cooking, and distribute food rations, or the cash equivalent, through the Public Distribution System.

It is very difficult to reach areas under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Despite these challenges, the U.S. government continues to work closely with humanitarian organizations to find ways to provide life-saving aid to all those who need it. Humanitarian agencies have strict protocols and employ strong controls to prevent armed groups, such as ISIL, from interfering with the delivery of life-saving humanitarian aid, including medical supplies and equipment. These control mechanisms help ensure compliance with applicable U.S. laws and with humanitarian best practices for operating safely in highly insecure environments. All of these steps help ensure that humanitarian aid gets to those who need it most, and that aid workers properly account for funds and materials – even in the midst or on the edges of active conflict.

In certain instances where vulnerable populations were inaccessible because they were completely encircled by ISIL – as on Mount Sinjar, in the town of Amerli, and in the case of the Abu Nimr tribe in Anbar – the United States, Iraqis, and other Coalition partners conducted airdrops of humanitarian supplies and targeted airstrikes to break ISIL's siege. These actions saved lives.

We are also tracking all available information about the numbers, locations, and treatment of thousands of women and girls ISIL has taken captive and subjected to rape, torture, and forced conversion. In addition to women and children, ISIL also reportedly holds an unknown number of men captive with an ultimatum to convert to Islam or be killed. In cases where those held captive have been able to escape, the United States is providing funding for emergency assistance to survivors of extreme forms of gender-based violence, including medical care, psychosocial support or counseling, emergency shelter or other safe accommodation, and legal assistance.

As areas are liberated from ISIL control, humanitarians will be able to reach more vulnerable people. ISIL has, however, booby-trapped homes and civilian areas, so returns will be gradual as unexploded ordinance present challenges to both the reintegration of the population and the ability to deliver humanitarian assistance. Over the coming year, the U.S. government will continue to work with international and non-governmental organizations to ensure aid is provided to those most in need in Iraq.

**Question 4:**

According to the most recent UN joint assessment of needs inside Syria, "Areas under ISIL control, in particular, are witnessing significant increases in the number of people in need, due to targeting of oil infrastructure and the coalition airstrikes." The areas currently (as of 12/14) controlled by IS are Raqqah (fully), and large parts of Deir ez-Zor, West and Southern Hassakeh, and Aleppo governorates. Clashes occur in other parts of Syria, including rural Damascus, Damascus, eastern Homs, Ain Al Arab, and Salamiyeh in Hama. The humanitarian needs on those areas, as in the rest of Syria, are staggering. Needs vary by governorate, but in all areas people experience shortages of food, medical supplies and staff, and items needed to survive the winter.

*For example:*

- In the Raqqah governorate alone there some estimated 1.6 million people, almost half of them – 740,000 – are in need of assistance.
- In Deir ez-Zor, Hassakeh, and Raqqah there are over 880,000 IDPs. All of them are in need of humanitarian assistance and in most cases the local communities are just as impacted by the ongoing conflict. There is almost a total collapse of economy and health infrastructure.
- In Raqqah the available medical aid is almost entirely provided by international NGOs. The last cross-line UN food delivery into Raqqah was in August 2014 and even then the quantity of aid did not meet the need.
- Over 600,000 people in Aleppo governorate are in need of food assistance and clean water.

What is the US administration doing to ensure that adequate assistance levels are maintained for the entire Syria humanitarian response, including in areas controlled by IS where independent humanitarian access is feasible?

**Answer:**

The United States continues to support life-saving aid throughout Syria, providing more than \$1.5 billion in humanitarian assistance within the country since the start of the crisis. Although ISIL's advances within Syria have made the delivery of humanitarian aid more difficult, we are reaching individuals in need living in ISIL-held areas.

U.S. government funding to UN agencies, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) enables them to provide vital medical care, food, relief items (such as blankets and heating fuel), water and sanitation supplies, shelter assistance, and protection services throughout all 14 governorates of Syria, including in ISIL-held areas as security conditions allow and based on need. As with all of our humanitarian assistance programs around the world, U.S. government partners put in place very strict protocols to prevent any interference in its delivery, including post-distribution monitoring missions.

The United States is focused on aiding all who need it throughout Syria more broadly. We co-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2165 and recently renewed the text as UNSCR 2191, authorizing UN agencies and partners to deliver assistance across Syria's borders and over internal conflict lines without the Syrian regime's permission. The initial resolution helped aid reach an average of 66 UN-designated "hard-to-reach" areas each month, improved from an average of 38 areas prior to the resolution's adoption. We have encouraged UN agencies and NGOs to coordinate their efforts to increase the number of locations reached and individuals assisted, and continue to lead efforts in international settings, such as the High-Level Group on Syria, to press for greater humanitarian reach to those in need of aid.